THE ISSN 0029-2397 • SUMMER 1973 $1.50

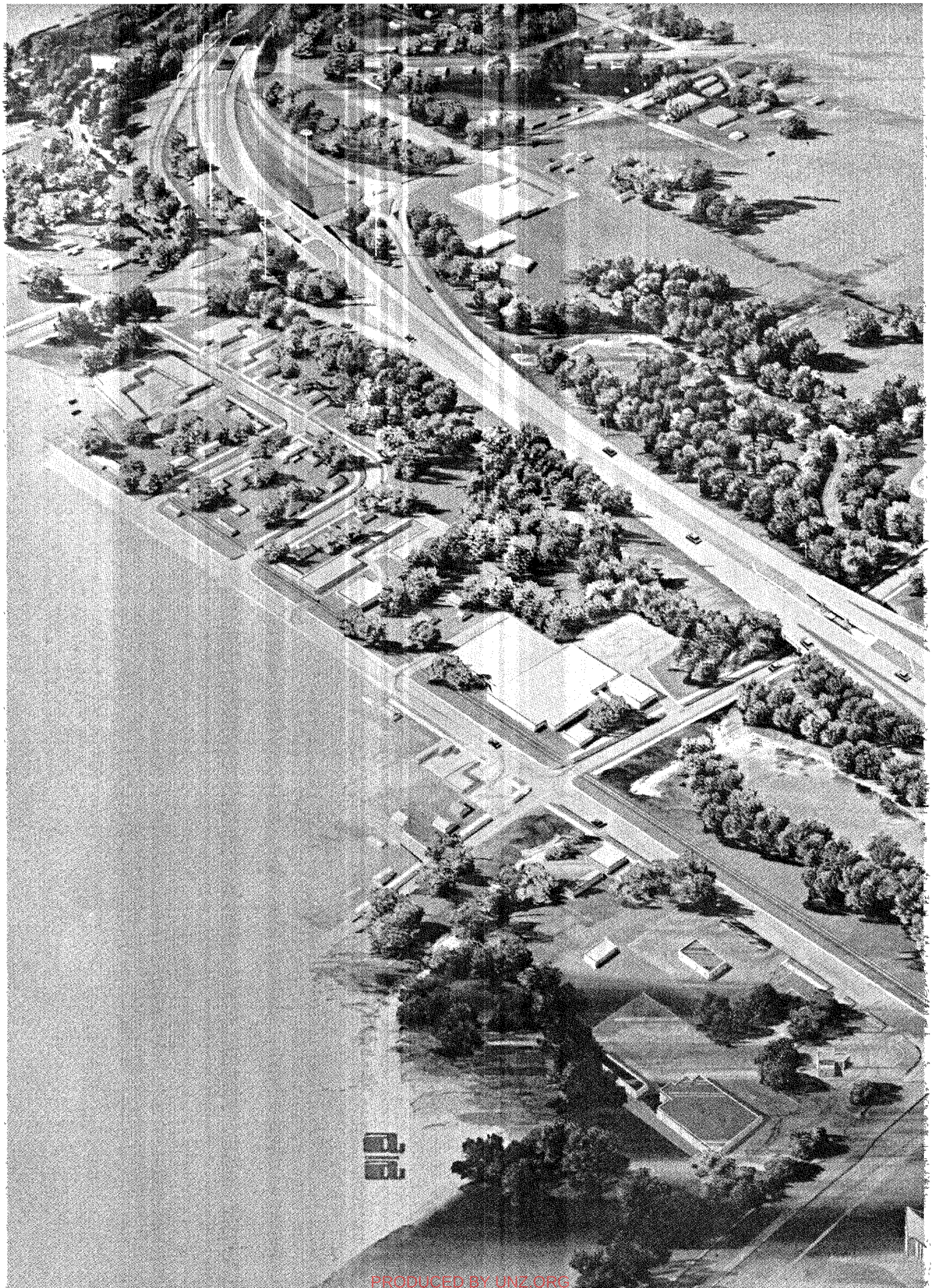
North American Review

STACKS
UNIVERSITY OF TULSA
JUL 2 1973
LIBRARY

Ronald Sukenick: "On the Wing"

The Environment: Arne Naess, Paul Shepard, R. A. Richardson and others

051
N0864
V258
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FOUNDED IN 1815

Vol. 258/No. 2/Summer 1973

The North American Review

ARTICLES

11 Hunting for a Better Ecology, *by Paul Shepard, with a foreword by Joseph W. Meeker*

16 Prologue to an Environmental Ethic, *by Joseph W. Meeker*

53 The Place of Joy in a World of Fact, *by Arne Naess*

58 The Curse of Abel: An Essay in Biblical Ecology, *by David Crownfield*

FICTION

23 Darling, *by Stephen Dixon*

29 On the Wing, *by Ronald Sukenick, with an afterword by Jerome Klinkowitz*

64 The Two Sides of Things, *by Gordon Weaver*

72 A Gentleman in a Dustcoat, *by Flossie Lewis*

POETRY

7 Poem, *by J. Johnston*

24 Zimmer with Lester under the Moon, *by Paul Zimmer*

27 Dream Song, *by Reg Saner*

52 The Cannibals, *by Paul Petrie*

63 Running, *by Stephen Dobyns*

70 Three Poems, *by Peter Wild*

75 A Man Going Deaf, *by Mark Halperin*

DEPARTMENTS

2 About This Issue

3 American Eye: A DISSENT FROM THE IMAGERY OF "SPACESHIP EARTH," *by R. A. Richardson;* THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE CONFEREES, *by Stephen Minot*

77 Books and Authors: *Reviews by Robert Gish and Stephen Minot*

Editorial and Business offices: UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA, CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

Rates: $1.50 A COPY: $6.00 A YEAR IN THE U.S. AND ITS POSSESSIONS, $6.15 IN CANADA AND LATIN AMERICA—ALL OTHER COUNTRIES $7.00 A YEAR

THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, Summer 1973. Vol. 258, No. 2. Published quarterly in March, June, September, December, at the University of Northern Iowa, 1222 West 27th Street, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613. Second Class postage paid at Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613. Printed in the U.S.A. Copyright © 1973 by the University of Northern Iowa. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved. Opinions expressed by contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the editors or of the University of Northern Iowa. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed envelope with return postage. **THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW** is indexed in Social Sciences and Humanities Index, Index to Little Magazines, Historical Abstracts, and the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature. Back file volumes are available from AMS Reprint Co., 56 East 13th Street, New York, N.Y. 10003, and from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106. U.S. and Canadian national newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 155 West 15th St., New York, N.Y. 10011.

Editor	ROBLEY WILSON, JR.
Poetry	PETER COOLEY
Design	ROY BEHRENS
Contributing Editors	RICHARD BROOK, JAMES HEARST, LEO J. HERTZEL, KENNETH LASH, JOHN LINDBERG, JOSEPH W. MEEKER, STEPHEN MINOT, NORA L. MAGID, JOHN PAGE, JOSEPH SANDER, WILLIAM K. WOODS
Business Manager	CHARLOTTE L. WILSON

Cover: *Roy Behrens/Richard Swale;* inside covers: *Architect Associates,* courtesy of the Iowa State Highway Commission.

This issue of The North American Review is supported in part by a grant from the Iowa State Arts Council.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

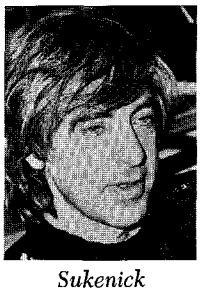
A story by George V. Higgins, "The Habits of the Animals: the Progress of the Seasons" (Winter 1971-72), has been selected to appear in *The Best American Short Stories 1973* (Houghton Mifflin).

Leo J. Hertzel, the NAR's man in the North Country, has won this year's Max H. Lavine Award for Scholarly Contributions to Contemporary Concerns, for his article on nuclear power (Spring 1972).

The cover of the Winter 1972-73 NAR, designed by Roy Behrens and photographed by Gay Burke, is included in a traveling exhibition drawn by the Society of Publication Designers from its annual competition.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Shepard



Sukenick

Constant readers will remark that this number of the NAR pursues our serious ecological concerns with a vengeance—not so much practically as philosophically, in a related set of discussions that drop a lot of heavy names, from Buckminster Fuller to Plato to Spinoza and Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, up to and including God Himself. The central point of it all: our salvation from ourselves is not technological, but visionary.

The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess explores the question of "joy," and concludes among other things that the failure of environmentalists to *directly* involve themselves with Nature is an impediment to solving environmental problems. Naess is no mere onlooker in this matter. Schooled in philosophy and psychoanalysis, he gave up his position at the University of Oslo in order to "free-lance" and his extra-academic accomplishments include the scaling, in 1950 and 1964, of Tirich Mir, highest mountain (25,273 feet) of the Hinderkush Ranges. Paul Shepard, recently at Dartmouth and now moving to Claremont, argues for a return to the sensibilities—the "alertness"—of pre-agrarian man. Joseph Meeker, one of our editors who has been at Santa Cruz and begins new duties at Athabasca University (Canada) in the fall, surveys the opportunities for a new ethic grounded in our growing realization that it is perhaps not man's mission only to exploit his world—that there are lessons in survival all around us if we will attend to them. David Crownfield, Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Northern Iowa (with a Harvard B.D. in New Testament studies, a Yale Th.D. in Christian Theology), looks at some of the Biblical underpinnings of current Western attitudes toward the natural world. Finally, R. A. Anderson, a philosophy professor in the University of Wisconsin's Department of General Engineering (!), takes strong exception to the popular notion that Earth is some kind of outsized spaceship.

The focus of this issue owes much to the National Environmental Conference ("Education for Survival") held at Northern Iowa in April, in the midst of one of the Midwest's more stunning spring blizzards. The Shepard and Meeker essays are based on talks given during the conference; the Crownfield article was motivated by it.

The fiction writers in this NAR: Ronald Sukenick lives in California, is one of the better known of the "new fiction" writers, and is more fully identified in Jerry Klinkowitz's brief essay beginning on page 48. Stephen Dixon is a New Yorker, with recent work in *American Review*, *Transatlantic Review*, and *Playboy*. Flossie Lewis teaches at Lowell High School in San Francisco. Gordon Weaver, director of the creative writing program at the University of Southern Mississippi, is the first winner of the St. Lawrence Award.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

R. A. Richardson / Stephen Minot

A Dissent from the Imagery of "Spaceship Earth"

The Hell with it — and other reasons

About a year ago the science editor of a publishing house sent me the manuscript of a book called *Spaceship Earth: An Ecological Primer.* His firm would be bringing it out soon, he said, and he asked for my comments on its general quality, usefulness and marketability.

Alas, I seem to be one of the few people who has not been struck by the resemblance between the earth and a spaceship. In fact, it used to cost me some of the enamel off my back teeth every time I heard the two compared, and while their constant conjunction has pretty much succeeded in grinding my sense of outrage down to a stump of pained dismay, the manuscript sent me still tempted my indignation.

As the author obviously knew, he invited himself into notable company by borrowing the "spaceship earth" idea. Buckminster Fuller, whose love for it seems to go deeper than anybody else's, has used it prodigally. Kenneth Boulding, almost equally enamored of it, is another well-known user. Lynton Caldwell, Garrett DeBell, Jane and Paul Ehrlich, Barbara Ward, John W. Gardner, and the late Adlai Stevenson have all thought it apt and called it into service. A major radio network has given the title "Spaceship Earth" to its regular environmental feature. It seems that the question of the earth's future cannot be addressed without recourse to it, and its employment is apparently taken as a manifest that its employer has gained the proper perspective from which to speak. But even though the image has recommended itself to so many and the phrase has entered the language to stay, I can't help wishing we had thought its implications through before we accorded it such easy immortality.

What those who use it want us to do, of course, is to catch the vision of a radically altered state of affairs and to see that the changed condition of man's relation to the earth requires us to command a new destiny. With the fact that the character of our existence has lately undergone a profound change, I have no quarrel, and I share the feeling that this requires a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

new understanding of things and must lead to basic adjustments in our habits of feeling, thought and action. What concerns me is whether the image of the earth as a spaceship meaningfully reflects the altered circumstances of our world, and whether the courses of action implicitly recommended by the image are adequate to the earth's needs and our own. My feelings on both counts are negative.

I think we ought to begin by considering the historical circumstances which have given the "spaceship earth" image whatever vividness it has. The idea that the earth is like a spaceship is obviously the outgrowth of our space program, and any impact that the image has upon the public consciousness is related in a fundamental way to *our efforts in space. To accept the* image, then, is to accept in some measure and at some level the plans and hopes (as well as the evasions and fears) out of which the space race has grown.

One of the more troublesome things about it, in fact, is just that—it has been a *race.* The United States and the Soviet Union have put satellites in orbit and men in space because each has wished to establish technological superiority over the other in order to hold the world hostage to its will. All this may seem too obvious to require mention, but so much has been said about the scientific value of space exploration and the social benefits of technological spin-off that we need to keep in mind that even if these could be shown to be real, they would still be nothing more than justifications after the fact for an enterprise intended from the very beginning to serve altogether different ends. Our space program is the offspring of a marriage of convenience between scientific technology and national ambition, and it is well to remember that some of the other members of this geo-political Jukes family include the strategy of nuclear "deterrence," the radical insecurity of ballistic and antiballistic missile systems, the development of chemical and bacteriological weapons, and the deployment of the electronic battlefield in that culminating monstrosity which is our unending war on the land and people of Southeast Asia. That the space program is the best of a bad lot strikes me as the most that can be said for it.

The point, to return to it, is that our space effort is the product of minds which have come to rely more and more extensively upon complicated machines, both to keep a dubious peace and to wage a dishonorable war. They have armed us with a technological arsenal which they themselves cannot imaginatively encompass, much less administratively control, and the tragedy for which we are headed with a certainty more than merely Greek is the recognition that our machines are not less fallible than the men who made them, but more. Far from protecting us against human selfishness, aggression and folly, we have simply written them large and armed them absolutely.

It is quite possible, indeed certain, that without the control exerted by the assumptions and actions of a complex of political, military, scientific and industrial leaders, we would never have launched a spaceship at all. So if the earth is to be one, what is the likelihood that it can be made into such without being similarly controlled? How much do we want that? How long can we survive it?

Even when these questions have been asked, the fact remains that we seem to have been gripped by a desire to strew our expensive junk through the solar system and seek apotheosis among the stars, and this desire is not the special creation of a handful of strategists, nor is it restricted to a clique of technologically spellbound managerial types who are forcing mankind heavenward against its collective will. The urge to pull ourselves up by the biological roots and fling ourselves into space is apparently broadly shared—and may run fatally deep. So while the belief that we might make ourselves the premier people of the world just by building the appropriate gadget is the American dream in its most characteristic form, the movement toward space is more than a national fantasy (else we could not have launched it with the brains of German scientists, nor competed in doing so with the Russians, nor aroused the envy of the French—and, for all I know, of every power on earth with a rankling sense of inferiority and an urge to feel modern), and its roots lie deep in a history which is not this country's alone.

Sir Bernard Lovell noted this in the summer of 1963, during a period of dialogue about the U. S. space program:

> "The challenge of space exploration and particularly of landing men on the moon represents the greatest challenge which has ever faced the human race. Even if there were no clear scientific arguments for proceeding with this task, the whole history of our civilization would still impel men toward the goal. In fact, the assembly of scientific and military with these arguments creates such an overwhelming case that it can be ignored only by those who are blind to the teachings of history, or who wish to suspend the development of civilization at its moment of greatest opportunity and drama." (Quoted in "The Challenge of Space," by Eugene M. Emme in Kransberg and Purcell, ***Technology in Western Civilization,*** Oxford University Press, 1967, Vol. II, p. 681.)

A critic could hardly say it plainer: we had to go whether it made any sense or not.

Perhaps to be skeptical of this vision is to be but a blind enemy of civilization and progress, as Sir Bernard suggests. Perhaps those who do not affirm it will someday occupy a deserved place in the annals of ignorant villainy beside the inquisitors of Galileo, just as the NASA historian, Eugene Emme, in the article from which I have taken the quote of Sir Bernard's, allows himself to hope. I doubt it, though I admit the risk.

It is not on the matter of historical tendency that I differ with these men, of course, for the fact seems as plain to me as it does to the noted astronomer or to the keeper of NASA's annals. What renders me disloyal to the faith of the age and makes me, at thirty-five, feel older than my own grandfather is my inability to find significance or value in a history that has reduced itself to this. Consequently, what they celebrate as the sweep of destiny strikes me as the working out of a pathological compulsion, and it both grieves and worries me.

It seems to me that we have been treating the earth as a kind of spaceship for a long time now; we have had a hard time seeing it as anything other than a vehicle for our fantasies of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

omnicompetence, and we have ridden it toward the future just as fast and furiously as we could make it go. Without being able to say where we were headed or what redeeming joys would await us there, we have rushed toward some perfected tomorrow with only pause enough to congratulate ourselves upon being so conspicuously on our way. Sure, it costs a lot to go and it leaves a mess behind, but then who cares? We will ride the world until we wear it out and then junk it along the way.

What prompts this desperate joy ride, what makes us wish to flee the nurturing earth and extirpate all nature in ourselves, is hard to say. Perhaps it is the revenge taken by the spirit we know we do not have as it pushes us toward the heaven in which we no longer believe. Clearly some kind of repression, inversion, or misdirection of the urge to transcendence is at work here. But, the question of what is driving us aside, any uncertainties about the direction we are traveling ought to be removed by looking at the real implications of "spaceship earth" instead of rhetorically invoking it in a ritual litany of misplaced hope.

A spaceship, we should first of all remind ourselves, is just a place where every aspect of being human is a problem to be solved. The performance of every natural function requires the utmost in prior deliberation, contrivance and control. A thing as easy and effortless as breathing becomes a matter of tremendous difficulty; perspiration raises more problems than just how to take the worry out of being close, and elimination is not just something for somebody's hung-up grandmother to whisper "toilet paper" about. On a spaceship, everything a man does or feels or needs to do gets in the way, and the only solution is to reduce all of these functions to manageable terms by narrowing them down to a less than biological routine so that the man himself is simply a tube among tubes with nothing to do but let things pass through him according to plan. The only things he needs to be able to do are to wait quietly, exert the maximum of emotional control, take his sleeping pills on schedule, and do a few calisthenics at the appointed hour just in case his body should ever be of use to him again. There is no room here for engagement with life's ardors or the rigors of real existence; no room for the joys of genuine surprise, or for the artful elaboration of life; no room for the pleasure and consolation of a human touch; no room, in short, for anything that makes life rich, vivid or poignant. Such possibilities have all been programmed out in the interest of contrived and artificial ends. Everything about a space trip is subsidiary to getting there and back again. Its excitement consists solely in the idea of being able to do it. The ride itself, if every prior calculation has been correctly made and every contingency adequately foreseen, is perfect boredom; otherwise it is sudden terror and quick oblivion. Nobody could live, in any significant sense, in a space ship, although for brief periods it is possible to survive in one—just as it is possible to survive in an iron lung.

Think of the heroes space travel has produced. Of course you will have to think of them in the plural and vaguely, because chances are that you cannot remember many of their names and even these you are unlikely to be able to match with specific exploits. (The ability to do this is apparently confined to a handful of twelve year old space buffs who are assiduously cultivated by NASA.) The chief feat of the men who have traveled in space may in the long run prove to be that having fulfilled one of the cherished ambitions of our civilization, they have yet entered history only technically; that is, they have made a place for themselves in the record books, but only those who think of history as a matter of record-keeping could suppose that they will therefore *live* in it. In anything other than a technical sense, they are already forgotten. This itself is strong evidence that space travel, far from being a human exploit, is only a computerized and commercialized version of one. The astronauts, like supermarket tomatoes, were bred for travel and display. Placed in a special environment and artificially ripened while being lavishly advertised, they were freighted to a destination where everything that could happen to them had to be known in advance, since otherwise it would not have been possible for them to go. Thus, the better prepared for the trip they were, the less they needed to make it. They had as much of the experience of space flight as they would ever have before they left the ground, and they need not have stopped with selling their memoirs in advance; they could have written them then, too. They traveled thousands of miles so that they could pose for the cameras which may rightly be regarded as the true first cause of their going; utter one self-conscious profundity, countless banalities and a few mild swear words (later carefully bleeped from the tape); waddle cumbrously around; hit a golf ball; plant a redundant flag beside the solar system's newest garbage heap; and then return triumphantly home to the waiting television studios where their endorsements of Volkswagens and other earthly goods could be immortalized. (True, true, there were those saving rocks brought back for Science.) A modern adventure to be sure. And men truly ripe for it. How adequately they have leapt to life from off the cereal boxes of our youth.

When the question of going to the moon or not going to the moon arose for us, it was a real test of the courage, character, sensitivity and intelligence of our society. In deciding to go we failed. But going did offer us a real chance to learn something. The lesson of the moon landings is not that man has a glorious future in space, but that he has none. When man ventures into space, he leaves his humanness behind. He cannot go without being reduced to a mere adjunct of the machines and techniques which are required to put him there. This means that we are stuck on this planet and that when the earth, and the flesh which is of the earth, caves in and ceases to support us, the technical intelligence on which we pride ourselves—and which is almost the only thing left on which we do pride ourselves—will be no more. All unintended, then, the spaceship is the vehicle of a truth. We belong to the earth, and not the earth to us. But this truth is not grasped by seeing the earth as a spaceship; it is seen only by understanding that that is exactly what the earth is *not*.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It should not be necessary to remind ourselves of this, but apparently it is: the earth is not a product of our ingenuity. We did not plan and build it, and over the long haul we have not guided its course. Neither have we consciously adapted our physical and psychic being to its exigencies. Certainly, our natural love of artifice and our native powers of thought have changed the conditions of our existence, and we have altered nature's nature with our own. But human nature is not merely a human creation; its limits lie outside of our intellectual grasp and exceed our technical control. The texture of our thought is not rich enough to create a world fit for us to inhabit. Consequently, the needs of our nature would never be met in a world of our contriving. Thus, while deliberation, planning, technical manipulation and intellectual control are human goods and often serve us well, we do not know how to found all of life upon them—and we never shall.

That, of course, is exactly what the aspiration latent in spaceship earth demands. It is also what makes it unachievable. To bring all the conditions of life within the realm of intellectual control is one of our deepest aspirations. All that keeps it from succeeding is the fact that thought is life's creature and not otherwise.

We have, it is true, gone some distance toward this goal of spaceship earth. Far enough, I wish I could believe, for us to begin to see what its everyday implications are and therefore take pause for thought.

We are increasingly the passive beneficiaries of an ever more remote expertise. Not only are the roads to be built, the wars to be fought, the planets to be visited, and the crises to be created and managed all decided by the presumably relevant body of experts; not only are the devices in use to get from here to there, or wash our clothes, or burn our toast, designed and built—and repaired if they can be—by procedures which become the more totally incomprehensible to us the more completely we come to depend upon them; but even matters touching upon the central issues of our personhood and our most intimate relations with our fellow creatures are simply material for expert manipulation by somebody else—whether advertising copywriter, public relations adept, institutional administrator, psychiatric social worker or what—whose special job it is to oversee that portion of our needs which falls to him. Increasingly, our chief duty as citizens is to recognize and be glad that somewhere somebody (or a body of somebodies) understands our interests better than we do, sells them to us, and looks after meeting them. More and more, every impulse to act or think or feel, everything we really need or want to do, gets in the way. Every urgency is undermined by the fear of ignorance, and all things wait upon the expert's check.

In the unlikely event that we look for a responsible party to tell him how well things go—or how ill—we never encounter the man we seek. We meet only the technician (or the administrator) smiling benignly at his console. He is not responsible; he is not in charge; he wishes us neither good nor evil, because beyond the careful caution of his expertise he does not wish at all. (He, after all, is only one of us.) At his fingertips are the controls of spaceship earth. His compass has two headings: boredom or oblivion. If we ride with him, our choice is to accept routine or go berserk and bring the whole thing crashing down. There is mounting evidence that we will do both: the latter seems to follow from the former with a logic as strong as the human personality itself. The jet liner and the skyjacker; the casual strollers in the plaza and the man with the rifle in the window overhead; the battle for men's minds and the technological devastation of a subcontinent; spaceship earth and the nuclear trigger—these are the deadly dialectic of impotence madly armed.

What we are up against are the limits of our own benignity. We have believed only the best of ourselves and willed only the good, and we have no patience for the question whether that is enough. So it is that a nation created in the dream and name of freedom has taken arms against the judgment of history itself and demanded that all the peoples of the earth, now and forever, yield to its assessment of itself or face extinction. A civilization that has aspired to ground life upon the sanctions and dictates of reason, so that the good for man might be attained and his happiness secured, is being betrayed by its own love of system, its need for order, and its uncritical awe before its own powers of abstraction into the complete institutionalization—and therefore the dehumanization—of every good. This is the culmination of "spaceship earth."

This narrow adventure of nationhood and the wide flow of what we like to call western civilization have merged in the quest for absolute control, for total determination, of the earth and its future. American know-how, encompassing the civilization's greatest achievements in science and technology and adding endlessly to them, will do what religion and philosophy could never do and make of life one seamless, ordered whole. Thus will our history be redeemed and an enduring order founded at last—not upon the empty aspirations and lofty sentiments of visionaries, seers and prophets, but on something we really understand: the production of real guns and artificial butter.

But we have been overtaken by a paradox. We are controlling the world by building a world nobody and nothing can control. The life we have made for ourselves is one of increasingly frequent and intimate contact with one another. We are deeply interdependent. Between each of us and the fulfillment of our basic needs there are so many indispensable intermediaries, we depend so utterly upon skills which are not our own, and all our fates are so profoundly intertwined that our deepest powers of technical invention can alter this circumstance only by augmenting it. Yet, at the same time, the capacity for care and responsible concern which alone might make for success under these conditions, and without which life would not be worthwhile, have been systematically undermined. Thus behind the superficial appearance of our mighty strength, there is a terrible and touching vulnerability. In innocence and optimism, we have made a world beyond our wildest dreams, and before our averted eyes it is turning into a nightmare in which the fortunate are only frightened, derelict, aimless,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

driven, alienated or bored, and the hard luck cases are strung out on lethal drugs or driven into acts of violence against themselves or anyone who happens by. In charge of all this are men whose deepest commitment is to the suppression of evidence so that everything can go efficiently forward, no one need be alarmed, and no one can be blamed. These days, the truth about ourselves is not to be had for the asking. It can be revealed only by those who are bold enough—or well enough placed—to steal it from the files.

Whether there is any escape from this winding up of our destiny I couldn't say. I don't know how we will get back down from here. The only things that suggest themselves to me all seem pretentious folly to the wisdom of the age: critically examine our true condition; ask what our happiness really consists in; be glad that nature is not in our sole charge; believe that she is wise beyond the ways of men and possesses trustworthy powers of regeneration which we must wait upon and live within; stop trying to run everything; think deeply; feel the limits of our thought, celebrate the deep unknowable and be at peace.

The chances of such suggestions being followed vary, of course, from slim to none. The mechanization of man, the automation of all feeling, thought and satisfaction which is already so advanced, has been the central project of our culture since the human imagination was seized more than 300 years ago by the idea that the universe was a great machine and nothing more. This image, although superseded and outgrown by some branches of science for fifty years and more, still holds the culture at large—and all the "human sciences" and most of the arts—in a deadly grip. The thinkers who made the modern world believed that the world was just a watch ticking away in a mechanical eternity; nowadays we are bright and shiny and up to date and say the earth is a spaceship, but the underlying fallacy is the same: that we know the inmost workings of the universe and have made it ours to do with as we will.

The very strength of this vision is what makes our peril so great: it has delivered into our hands a tremendous power, but it has undercut all ideas of man and nature, all attitudes and values, all hopes and aspirations that might make possible its purposeful direction. We run the world for naught, and we are nothing ourselves beyond our capacity to run it. It is this aimless potency which has driven things to the verge of collapse, and the prospects for mending them short of catastrophe are not very good. The advent of a new age—so necessary to our survival—is a terrifying prospect: birth, too, is trauma and pain; before we take the risk of it we want insurance and an anodyne. Who dares, who even has the right, to think of changes we can't automate? No whisper of dissent against the workings of the status quo can be allowed without a blueprint of a better world that tells exactly where the plumbing is. Clearly, without this, the criticism is invalid and the critic mad.

So it may be only the empty gesture of a fool, but if it is true that the only future open to us is a ride on spaceship earth; if every direction is to be charted by the experts who alone command the facts and therefore everything else; if every aspect of being human is only a problem to be solved by nerveless intellection; if the world is to be only what Eric Heller has called a dull inferno "ruthlessly examined by the detached mind and confusedly suffered by the useless passions;" if that is all the future holds and all the concerned environmentalist can say is "get on board," then I say the hell with it. I'm not going.

–R. A. Richardson

J. JOHNSTON

POEM

listen,
the darkness
comes and says

good morning,
moving as if
nothing matters,

laughs and
relieves itself
while watching

you undress,
noticing
your skin

becomes you,
wondering
how weary

it is to
blossom.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Discreet Charm of the Conferees

Bemusing the Muse in Washington

The Library of Congress staged a Conference on Teaching Creative Writing in January of this year. I was there. I did not go with any premonition of disaster. Indeed, I arrived with a kind of mindless optimism. I knew many of the speakers personally—two of them were my mentors years ago. The others I knew by reputation and I respected what they had done. Somewhere in the back of my mind there must have lurked the realization that National Conferences when well-funded and spelled with capital letters contain the genes for self-destruction; but how could this be possible in *my* field?

I had underestimated the dead weight of tradition. There is a time-honored ritual by which one organizes National Conferences on Important Issues. I was naive to think that The Library of Congress would consider alternatives.

First, one appoints a nominating committee which is a harmonious group of people who have known each other over the years and share the same values. Second, one compiles a list of speakers who (1) have a national reputation, (2) have "reliable" views on the subject at hand, and (3) are known personally by members of the nominating committee. To this group is then added one woman, one black, and one speaker under 50.

Still, the cast of characters on the program was stellar. With men like that, how could it possibly go wrong? There was Elliott Coleman, who founded the writing program at Johns Hopkins and has served there as a gentle and humane critic for generations of writers since the early '40s. And John Ciardi, who once wrote tough, moving verse in a contemporary idiom and has accumulated years of experience first as a teacher and then as an editor. And Wallace Stegner, one of the founders of the Creative Writing Center at Stanford. And Paul Engle, founder of the Program in Creative Writing at Iowa. So many founders!

And as if that were not rich enough for two days, the conference provided a host of panel members, each of whom had time to talk—George Garrett, Theodore Morrison, Michael Browne, Josephine Jacobsen, Scott Momaday, Miller Williams, Margaret Walker, John Barth, Ralph Ellison, Robie Macauley, Louis Rubin, William Lederer. The mind boggles at such talent brought together under one roof for two days. Yet we were only 35 minutes into the first session when it was clear that these two days were going to do more harm than good for the teaching of writing.

I don't mean that it was simply dull. I can take boredom in stride. The tragedy of the conference was that the tone set very early was in fact dangerous and destructive. Those of us who take our students as seriously as we take our own writing began to wonder if perhaps we had been naive all these years. We had to reassure ourselves that what we were doing had some merit. Rather than being uplifted by the experience, many of us returned to our classes after two days trying to recover from the conference as if it had been a virus.

Now that I have had a chance to regain my health, I think I can with cool dispassion level four specific charges against those who set the tone of that conference. I list these with apologies to those fine individuals who tried to counter such attitudes—and also to those younger teachers of creative writing in the audience who may have wondered if what they heard was representative of the profession at large.

* * *

First, the spirit was anecdotal. Theodore Morrison and Paul Engle receive top honors in this area. We were not more than twenty minutes into the first session when Paul Engle indulged himself in a wandering, conversational, chuckle-inducing report under the general heading of "How far we've come." In the old days, we were told, teachers of creative writing didn't have the respect that they do today. Doubtless true, but there was little in his statement—or others that morning—to indicate that this new respect was justified.

Theodore Morrison continued on this leisurely stroll down memory's lane. "Let me be a bit personal and autobiographical," he said, and 900 teachers of creative writing took a deep breath before going down for the second time.

Still, I maintained faith. After all, the morning's session was entitled "A Perspective of Academic Programs Teaching Creative Writing," and while one might think that this would be a broad view of what is going on today, there is nothing in the wording which forbade spending the morning recalling old programs and the names of teachers long since dead. The afternoon session was on "The Writing of Poetry"; here, surely, the mandate for Paul Engle was to say at least something about the writing of poetry. But no: once again we heard memories from Iowa in the old days, a liturgy recited in slow and measured cadence. He could not have been aware of how frequently he repeated the phrase, "in the old days."

My second charge is one of irrelevance. I assume that we have passed through the period in which "relevance" was a slogan; I would like to think that we can once again treat it as a reasonable expectation—particularly when discussing the teaching of writing. It was like slipping through a time-warp to hear Theodore Morrison tell us that "We need to teach the use of the English language in its purest form." And we had barely recovered from that when we were urged to instill in our students a recognition of "the beauty and the strength of the balanced sentence."

Richard Eberhart was for some reason not on the list of speakers, but he was in the audience and rose to deliver a prepared statement which he had written out with some care. It turned out to be an award-winning display of irrelevance. "Creative writing," he suggested, is a poor term because, after all, isn't all writing

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

creative? Beaming, he then went on to recommend that we all adopt the term "imaginative writing." I cannot fault the wit, the charm, and the balanced sentences with which he converted this writers-conference cliché into a ten minute address. But speaking as one who has taught courses under both titles–as well as "Literary Writing"–I can assure Mr. Eberhart that the quality of student writing is not affected one iota by the title of the course.

On a slightly higher level, Scott Momaday dusted off another familiar irrelevancy. "I would like to call into question the premise that writing can be taught." Ho-hum! There is always someone at writers conferences who raises that one, though usually it is not a someone of Mr. Momaday's stature. I continue to insist that the only proper time to ask that question is before one arrives at a conference. If one is genuinely convinced that the entire profession is deluded, then the decision to attend such a gathering is true madness.

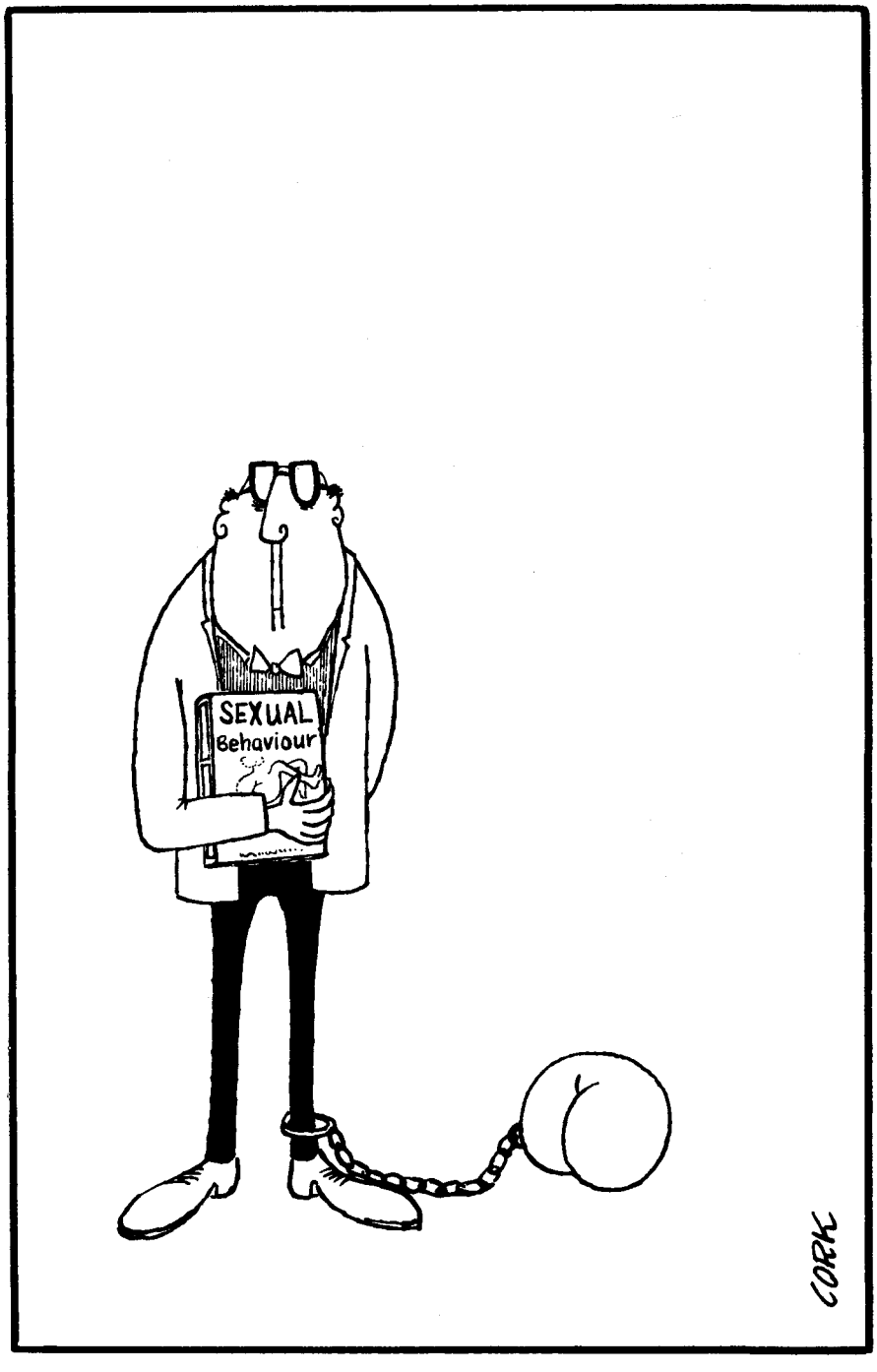
It saddens me to describe this affair as anecdotal and irrelevant. But at this point my lament turns to anger. The conference was also dominated by a spirit of élitism and negativism, and this is unforgivable.

In Paul Engle, élitism took the form of classic male chauvinism. In one of his lengthier anecdotes he described a woman who, upon meeting him again many years after taking his course, kissed him and thanked him for the advice he had given her when she was his student. He quoted her as saying, "If you hadn't discouraged me from writing, I would now be saying, 'If it weren't for this slob of a husband and these three brats, I would be a great poet.' " The audience responded variously with smug chuckles and hisses.

One does not have to be heavy into Movement ideology to see what this is saying about women. How lucky she was that some male figure told her that she would never make it in the demanding, masculine field of serious creativity! What a violation of her God-given duty to husband and surly children to have considered writing poetry! And entirely aside from the chauvinism, there is in his charming anecdote the clear implication that poetry must be reserved for those who can spend a lifetime at it. No part-timers allowed. And by extension, don't try to be creative unless you have a reasonable chance to be a national star.

This pride in having the guts to tell students to quit writing was voiced by a number of panelists. Would these same individuals oppose with self-righteous indignation the person who plays the piano or the violin for pleasure, even though that person might not have the time or the talent to end up with a major symphony orchestra? Would these panelists tell a painter to sell his brushes and quit if there was no likelihood of showing at the Midtown Gallery? Just what right does any teacher have to tell a student to stop being creative?

A more subtle form of élitism appeared in the guise of self-doubt. Perhaps everything we have been doing in class is pointless. If so, then writers



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

must be chosen by God or the Muses for greatness.

Scott Momaday was not the only one to express this sort of agonizing reappraisal. Even Wallace Stegner—who came closer to dealing with genuine issues than anyone else at the conference—was tormented with doubts. "I have been 43 years in this business," he said, "and I don't know if I have done any good." A sad pronouncement for someone as dedicated as he. "We've been training people for a profession which barely exists."

Interesting word choices there: *business* and *training*. Do teachers of painting and music refer to their work as "this business"? I don't know. But I do know that teachers of the other arts do not spend their conference time wondering whether they should go on. I also know from talking with others in the corridors that no one came to that conference in order to decide whether to stop teaching; everyone came there with the hope of teaching better.

Stegner was also deeply depressed by the question of whether he could do anything whatever for black students. He is to be commended for being the only white speaker in two days who admitted that the problem even exists. But his sense of paralysis was not helpful. The sad fact is that with a few exceptions there is almost nothing a white teacher can do for black writers, particularly if that teacher is over 30. Right now, young black writers need black teachers, and this will probably continue for a decade. All a white teacher can do in many schools is to keep his door wide open and be honest and straight with those few black students who wish to make contact. This is regrettable, but there is a touch of élitism in the notion that without white teachers these students are lost.

Much more pernicious—and by far the most serious of my complaints—was the negativism which took the form of bitter antagonism against all students. John Ciardi, Paul Engle, William Lederer, and even Wallace Stegner toward the end of the conference, indulged in the most extraordinary act of student-baiting.

Students, they claimed, as a group "don't read," "can't write an English sentence," "have a tin ear for language," and, get this, "are guilty of colossal arrogance."

"I've been to these sub-culture readings," John Ciardi said, "and there is nothing there." *Nothing*, John? Then why do *they* go? They're not even getting academic credit for attending.

What makes this attitude so heartbreaking is that I can remember John Ciardi when he was a rather unwashed poet right after World War II. He was a veteran (as we, his students, were); at Bread Loaf he wore a leather flight jacket, played poker, and delivered tough, straight-to-the-gut criticism. At Harvard he told us to use the language of everyday speech. He assured us that the post-war idiom was going to be fresh, that the establishment conventions had been overturned. In *Mid-Century American Poets*, published in 1950, he wrote that "There is no subject not fit for poetry and no word not fit for poetry . . . . The language of common speech is preferable to enlarged rhetorical constructions." And now, 1973, he is saying that those who catch the rhythm and the flavor of street-language have no business being poets. We should, he stated, concern ourselves with "the language of people who care about language."

This shift is not just one of literary values. It has to do with his attitude toward students. He has, significantly, given up teaching as his major occupation. He has also left Bread Loaf. "They plan to set up small conferences and do away with the lectures. And that is exactly what I oppose . . . . They probably will give students a chance to get up and talk. I've always resisted that."

In fairness, the conference was not entirely anecdotal, irrelevant, élitist, and negative. There was marvelous wit in John Barth's reading, compassion in Margaret Walker, political integrity and toughness in William Lederer. Robie Macauley made a brilliant observation about the need to expand the audience for good fiction and poetry (a point which was never developed), and Ralph Ellison was also willing to discuss real issues. And all but forgotten were the words of Elliott Coleman at the very beginning of the conference: "As teachers of writing, we have helped to create an environment." And "Criticism is an act of love."

These voices were drowned out by the bitterness and hostility which grew through the course of the conference, and reached its peak at the end of the final session on "Non-Fiction Prose."

There are two major conclusions we can draw from this conference, though neither of them have anything to do with how to teach. First, the problems we face when trying to help students are in no way met by having major figures give major addresses to a large and passive audience. The *form* of the conference was wrong from the start. Second, insights into the development of teaching as an art are not to be found in the experiences of men longing for retirement. The *content* of the conference was without hope.

For all this, I still think it would be possible for teachers of creative writing to help each other. To end on a positive note, here are some thoughts on how this might be done:

1. The conference must be small—no more than 100.

2. It should be regional, so that as many as possible can maintain friendships made there.

3. It should be preceded by printed statements prepared by about six teachers of writing—these to take the place of orations.

4. The conference should be devoted entirely to small-group discussions in which teachers deal directly with genuine issues—not just technique, but attitudes and values.

5. Any participant who begins to describe students as illiterate, insensitive, and arrogant may, upon the majority vote of his discussion group, be asked to pack his bags and go home.

Under these circumstances, I think we as a group of writers who teach and teachers who write might learn a great deal from each other. More than learn, we could gather from each other stimulus, encouragement, and a sense of direction. Ours is an enormously complex profession; we owe it to ourselves to draw from the best and the most enthusiastic among us.

—*Stephen Minot*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PAUL SHEPARD'S TENDER CARNIVORE

A Foreword

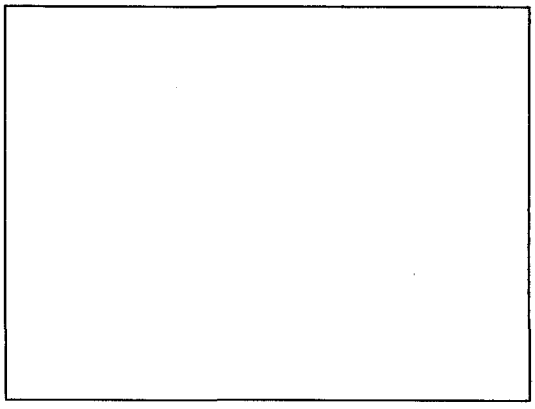
The Noisy Environment Movement has been occupied with problems of pollution, population, and the misuse of natural resources. That is where public concern now seems focused, and that is where political clout is growing in favor of more intelligent use of the earth by its people. While this important work has occupied public attention in recent years, comparatively little notice has been given to a Quiet Environment Movement which has been developing from studies of animal behavior, cultural anthropology, genetic evolution, ecology and the reëvaluation of human philosophical traditions as these illuminate human relationships to nature. The Noisy Environment Movement is a potent force which will change our laws, our economics, and many of our social priorities, but the Quiet Environment Movement promises to change our consciousness, our cultural traditions, and our sense of what it means to be a member of the human species. It also promises to become noiser thanks to people like Paul Shepard.

The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game (Scribner's, 1973), summarized by its author on the following pages, is the most eloquent and powerful statement to appear so far from the quiet but deep levels of a new environmental awareness of mankind's role in the ecology of the earth. Shepard seeks here a redefinition of humanity based upon the evolutionary origins of our minds and bodies. Recognition and acceptance of our origins, he argues, must guide us toward a future where it will be possible to live at home on the earth rather than as strangers here. That means facing the implications of our million-year history as a hunting primate and taking stock of the biological and mental inheritance which runs far deeper in us than the "history of civilization" of the past five or six thousand years.

Controversy is predictable in response to Paul Shepard's argument. Most of us—including our most powerful and intelligent thinkers—persist in the belief that humanity began with the invention of language, technology, and agriculture, and that our history prior to those developments is both inconsequential and uninteresting. Human pride depends upon our record of achievements since we learned to manipulate nature, and we have generally felt some shame or embarrassment when we have thought about that pre-literate hunting primate who lived as a part of his natural setting, but who is our ancestor and remains somewhere within us. Shepard's description of our hunting forebears as inventive and ethically admirable people with a lifestyle finely tuned to their ecological environment will puzzle some and shock others, especially when they realize that much of the subsequent development of civilized culture must be counted a loss for humanity rather than a gain. Shepard challenges our traditional views of human history at the level of their basic assumptions, and we can be sure that the struggle to defend those assumptions will be vigorous and probably rather nasty.

The truth or falsehood of Paul Shepard's argument is not the essential issue; what matters most is that he has raised questions which can no longer be ignored by anyone who seriously cares about humanity's relationship to the natural environment. The exploration of these questions seems likely to reveal that ecology is more than a contemporary fad: it is the foundation for a cultural and philosophical reappraisal more sweeping than those we have known before.

–Joseph W. Meeker



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Paul Shepard

HUNTING FOR A BETTER ECOLOGY

Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* was perhaps one of the most catalytic books in thinking on the environment in the first half of this century. Leopold died twenty-five years ago this spring, fighting a grass fire on his neighbor's lot, and accepted the first chair in game conservation in the United States, established by the University of Wisconsin just fifty years ago. *A Sand County Almanac* has become a small classic in this field. It and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* are probably this century's two most incisive books on man and nature.

The *Almanac* went beyond questions of technique and how we are to improve the way in which we use our natural resources. Leopold himself was an ecologist, and yet the book transcended ecology, because the most noteworthy and perhaps most quoted chapters in *A Sand County Almanac* involved what Leopold termed "a land ethic" and "an ecological conscience." He saw these as more fundamental and necessary even than the management practices and exploitive manner by which Americans were skinning the continent. Leopold confronted us not only with a system that didn't work at the level of its instruments and its tools, but a system that had not been working at the level of human conviction and human values and human spirit. In his emerging awareness Leopold has become for us a model of the change in attitudes that we now see as necessary, and yet a change which is difficult to describe and even more difficult to bring about in any kind of systematic way. Leopold, then, is the prototype, and a curious one, and we ask if this change is to happen in America how did it happen in Leopold himself? What happens to a person that brings this about, and is there anything there that in Leopold's own story might be helpful to us in coming to terms with so slippery a prescription as a land ethic?

Leopold was a trained forester and spent a large part of his early years with the Forest Service, the U. S. Department of Agriculture. He was an ecologist—that is, a biologist trained in the study of the interrelationship of organisms and their environment, and he was a hunter. And it's curious that if you look at the *Sand County Almanac* you find his pastime as a hunter becoming more and more important as a pivot on which his attitudes were changed. Although the lessons he learned as a trained forester and ecologist were important, there were other foresters and other ecologists who failed then—and still fail—to recognize the difference between ethic and policy. Leopold's transformation comes from his hunting. He's a hunter who wrote in the preface to *A Sand County Almanac* that there are some people who can live without wild things and there are some who cannot, and that he was one of the latter. Perhaps this is an embarrassment to us because we're concerned with the conservation of life and we think of the hunter as a killer, not the gentle saviour, not the religious vegetarian or the religious metaphysician who deliberately goes about avoiding any killing of life. Here's a man whose own metamorphosis turned on the act of hunting itself. We're perhaps puzzled because we don't understand it and because our culture sees the hunter as that part of ourselves whom we'd just as soon forget—that past stage of crude savagery through which our ancestors had to pass in order to achieve civilization and to rise to a higher humanity and understanding; that tradition in our society which thinks of the past in Hobbes' words as a "barbarianism," a matter of war of "all against all," a life which he said was "nasty, brutish, and short." It is regarded as a brief, unreflective interlude spent in constant fear and danger, in an environment that was always threatening either to destroy him directly by wild animals or an environment threatening to destroy by the lack of food or his exposure to the elements; a life of constant want, struggle, and deprivation, relieved only finally by modern life, where man was at the mercy of geography and weather as we are not, without control over his environment, and whose behavior was ruled, as it is in all cave-men, by his lowest emotions, his animal appetites and lusts. We admire perhaps his spirit to survive because, after all, it meant that we could come into existence, but we deplore his life as a life and his misfortune to have been born so long ago. So he is the animal in us which we strive to overcome that knows little of human love, and little of beauty as we understand it, or of rational thought—little, in other words, of civilized life.

The image of the caveman has for five thousand years been a spur to Christianity and to the goal of progress. Predation focuses on death, as man was part of natural food

Copyright © 1973 by Paul Shepard

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chains and it was necessary for him to kill other creatures in order to survive. Yet, it was the death of innocent things, and we are outrageously reminded by the savage of the past that we ourselves are stalked by death, and that we ourselves are cast in a natural mold from which we would escape into immortal life. Death is said to have come into the world with the Fall, and life to have existed very differently before Man sinned. One finds today many theologians who are much concerned about ecology and the environment; yet there is a limit to which they are ready to accept the ecological idea, and I think that that limit is very clearly seen in their resistance to an unavoidable order of existence in which the pattern is based on food chains and the necessity of predator and prey, and of killing to eat. Many of my own students and young friends likewise have reached this point in their reluctance to embrace ecology as a model of life. Ecology has not been subversive only as a challenge to a society which has infinite wants and is oriented to consumerism and pollution and compulsive manipulation, but because its central reality is the food chain. Man's ecology is based on killing by hunting and gathering.

How true is the picture of the savage and barbarian that I've just described, how consistent with what we now understand about him from anthropologists who study the barbarian—from the examination of his bones and ancient campsites, as well as the hunter that still lives in some twenty-odd surviving relic cultures? For some two million years, hunting/gathering was the shape and the frame of human life. That two million years provides us a perspective on the ten thousand years since the beginning of agriculture and perhaps three or four thousand years since the beginning of urban civilization. Hunting, or cynegetic, man lived in small groups in a home range of several hundred square miles. His food consisted of about twenty percent meat. The hunter in our past and in our present, is primarily a plant eater who eats meat as a relish, for whom hunting is more important in ceremonial and token ways than as nutrition. He lived and still lives in those parts of the land which are vegetatively park-like: glades, savannas, steppes, at the edge of the forest where forest and prairie meet and a mixture of plant and animal life is at its most rich and most diverse. Is he engaged in a daily and continuous struggle from dawn to dusk for his food? Studies of the Kalahari bushmen in Africa indicate that hunters and gatherers—the men doing the hunting, the women doing the gathering—work about two to three days a week and that they spend the rest of their time socializing, sleeping, dancing, visiting, being hosts, telling stories, playing with children, making music. The population size of these ancestral beings of ours and of our cousins who still hunt and gather was quite small. Were they constantly afraid and in danger of being destroyed?

One of the most consistent observations of today's study of hunters is that they have no anxiety even about tomorrow. They lack our national epidemic of anxiety neurosis and widespread vascular disease. Both of these are caused by constant fear and tension and are not present in these people at any significant level. Are they indeed in danger all the time? There is a high mortality of infants, but their life expectancy beyond the third year is similar to our own. They are not constantly being eaten by saber-toothed tigers or modern lions. There is no organized warfare.

What is the quality of cynegetic existence? Bushmen aborigines, pygmies, American Indians live or lived in a rich, stable and diverse environment, using as many as four score kinds of plants for food and some fifty or sixty kinds of animals. When one kind was unavailable it was easy enough to shift off to another. This constant environment is characterized by mature, natural communities—by which I mean a visible continuity where drought, floods, storms, and weather are not so likely to devastate as they are more simplified environments of the kind associated with agriculture. Was he a club-carrying brute who is prepared to bash on the head the nearest person if he sees something he wants, and who has no understanding of the more artistic and sensitive side of human life? There is little evidence for it. Known cynegetic people spend a substantial part of each day engaged in talk, sleep and music; some of the creations of paleolithic hunters and gatherers are among the supreme achievements of mankind—I mean the drawings that still survive in the caves of France and Spain, Russia, Hungary, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and parts of North Africa.

What about his technology? Was he in fact dependent on a few blunt instruments, and is he still? The Aurignacian people, who lived twenty-five thousand years ago, had a tool kit of over two hundred kinds of instruments, many of which any individual man would have been capable of making. A number of these are so beautiful and exquisitely made that there are today only a handful of people in the civilized world who are able to make them—not only tools of stone, but of wood, bone, leather, tusk and tooth. Is he in conflict with his neighbors and settling all of his arguments with his bows and arrows, his spears and his clubs? None of the living hunting and gathering peoples that we know carry on any kind of organized warfare or conscription or slavery, nor is there evidence that they did so in the past. We find warfare in an organized state among some peoples who still do some hunting and gathering, as in parts of Central New Guinea, where there are no large mammals to hunt. Some of cynegetic man's encounters with neighboring peoples involve expiatory measures to remove possible friction by formality and ritual, but more often they are simply joyful meetings in which they see relatives and friends. They are bonded by the tradition of exogamy: the women marry outside of the immediate small band, so that they are related by blood, as it were, to the other people around them, who are not therefore alien. Are these people accumulative? Do they gather and amass material goods? They can hardly do that since they are largely mobile and they have only as much as they can carry. Generosity is the passway to prestige, and interestingly enough it's not simply that they *have* enough to engage in generosity, but that giving becomes intensified when things are scarce—when one kind of material, such as material for making into a tool, is in low supply. Are they diseased and malnourished? How can they be healthy without modern physicians and modern medicine and modern

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hospitals? One recent student of the Indians of Central America found them in superb health and considered that they were so because the children were allowed to play in the mud and dirt and to get a large dose of bacteria while they were still quite small. They had extremely high antibody levels. And being creatures of sparse numbers and rare distribution, like wolves and tigers, contagious diseases are uncommon and so are epidemics. They are not in a good ecological position to pass on germs that sweep through populations of animals and men in high density. Many of the illnesses of modern man, or any men in higher populations, have come into existence or become important to our lives after our world population grew and the patterns of our distribution became such that illness could be easily passed on from one person to another. What of the savage's thought, sensibility and attention: what quality of mind and consciousness had these barbarian, savage ancestors of ours? What was their normal attitude toward the surroundings they moved through, either as male hunters or female gatherers? According to the Spanish historian and philosopher, Ortega y Gassett, the hunter's mind was finely tuned; y Gassett, a contemporary of Leopold's, never hunted but wrote a beautiful little essay on hunting which has recently been translated by Howard Wescott. He says, "The hunter does not look tranquilly in a determined direction, sure beforehand that the game will pass in front of him. The hunter knows that he does not know what is going to happen, and this is one of the greatest attractions in his occupations. Thus he needs to prepare an attention of a different and superior style, an attention which does not consist in riveting itself on the presumed, but consists precisely in not presuming anything and avoiding inattentiveness. It is a universal attention which does not ascribe itself on any point and tries to be in all points. We have a magnificent name for this, one that still conserves all the zest, vivacity, and imminence: alertness. The hunter is the alert man." He contrasts him to the farmer: "The farmer attends only to what is good or bad for the growth of his cereals, or the maturation of his fruit. The rest remains outside his vision, and in consequence he remains outside the completeness that is the countryside. The tourist sees broadly the great spaces, but his gaze glides; it seizes nothing; it does not perceive the role of each ingredient in the dynamic architecture of the countryside. Only the hunter, upon imitating the perpetual alertness of the wild animal for whom everything is danger, sees everything and sees each thing functioning as facility or difficulty, as risk or protection." Y Gassett knew nothing, or very little, of ecology. He may not even have heard the term at that point, because he doesn't use it in his essay. This being whom he describes is very unfamiliar to our culture. He forces our frame of past reference to change. My students, despite their openness to a new appraisal of the hunter, backslide once we get into conversation about him. The old preconceptions and misconceptions always steal back into it some way, because of our orientation to the idea of progress: the assumption that we have in fact improved things continuously and we need a kind of barbarian in the background shadows to convince us that we are better than we were. Cynegetic man is at a different past and different place than we know. Even if we accept him as perhaps a different being than we thought, of what possible interest can he be to the necessity of our own present and our own future? Even if we acknowledge that he is something beautiful, like an ancient tree or a past civilization, how are we to take this information into account in a world where obviously we cannot all be hunters and gatherers?

The answer is not easy, but there are some ways—in understanding human growth, for example. Our individual lives unfold in precise temporal ways, alike throughout our species, including hunting and gathering peoples. The life of each individual is framed in timed stages, and each step of this unfoldment has its environmental demands and transactions. Each of these came into existence as part of our evolution. We continually produce what produced us.

An example of this is from that part of the life cycle we call adolescence—let us say from the eleventh year to the sixteenth. This is the time during which a young human being, in no matter what culture he lives, becomes interested in poetry and puns and in the new meanings of language. This is associated with the fact that he is going to receive the tales or myths of his culture which tell in a metaphoric way, in a poetic form, those important truths about his own kind and his own purpose in the world. He is going to become disengaged from his family to some degree and this disengagement is geared to a taciturnity and to the frictions between him and his parents which come about in almost every society. Disengaged from his parents and his siblings, he is going to become attached to a group and display an intensity of feeling for particular peers that he'll never again experience. Associated with this commitment is a kind of idealism in which the world is not nearly as good as it could be. Erik Erickson has called this the necessity of having something toward which one's fidelity can be directed. Hence he lives in a clique of blood brothers who are crucially important, for when there exist certain mentors or guides or masters outside of his family. At fourteen a human becomes interested in ultimate questions in a way that he is not at ten or eleven. It is as though this unfolds, comes out, turns on, following an inner blueprint in every individual, a stage in which wholeness must somehow now become complete and for which a feedback must be made, not only by society as a social organization, but as the translator of the ultimate other, the whole of the cosmos. A confrontation must be arranged with his natural world or it will always seem alien, other, and potentially hostile to him. It's a time in which skill and at the same time experiences of solitude may be essential, and finally a time which culminates in some sort of initiation.

All the great modern religions recognize the importance of the initiation coming toward the end of adolescence, which solemnizes the transformation of this person into new status. That this is something invented by culture, I think, has been part of our ideological imagination. Rather, it seems to be built into the life cycle of the individual to require a return—a facilitating on the part of the natural world mediated by his society—in which the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

particular content can vary, but in which the basic necessity of receiving a poetic, mythic, orientation about the world is given. It is part of his biology. Perhaps our whole life cycle may be eventually understood as characterized by these kinds of critical period needs, rather than obliging us to think of a human being as something that simply grows and expands until it's twenty-one and then begins down a staircase of decline and gradual failing of functions.

So we stand at the threshold of looking for new ways to direct and find a future which is more ecologically satisfactory and stable for us. There are clues, in our own background and in this kind of a past built into our own bodies, which must be taken into account, which will involve the redirecting of the human encounter with nature. We commonly hold that we want a society that operates economically and nearer to a steady state, a life that enables us to achieve personal fulfillment, enough small group contact to let us have a consistent body of close friends, the means for according a respect for all of living things, a sense of the connectedness of life, of atunement and alertness. Such is a description of those primitive people. The wave of the future is the past. With those who say we cannot go back to the past, I would certainly agree. We cannot go back to the past, but the reason is not that we are caught on an arc which propels us through progress into a future. The reason is that we never left it. The genetic blueprint each of us carries in his cells is not some kind of gross outline or vegetative substructure, but an exquisite set of options that may or may not be taken up by the social group and society and fulfilled, the kind of series of harmonic feedback fields of activity and action which demands specific timing and otherness in the environment.

Instead we have created a degraded environment, not merely since industrialization, but beginning long before that. We have surrounded ourselves entirely with man-made things, including domestic animals, in which the diversity and richness of the natural and wild is diminished, deficient in that which is essential for the life of the mind and in the wildness which is necessary for healthy development of attention. This pastoral world then is not a place of innocence and morality, as the 18th Century image of the Golden Age would have it. Agriculture was the origin of famine, because of monocultures, in which the life of the people depended on single crops with their vulnerability to disease epidemics. The obsession about scarcity begins there, despite the fact that the world which replaced hunting and gathering was one which was occasionally more productive. A world emerged centered on the defense of place and of territory and the aggressive expansion into territories in a way that was unknown to the people who preceded the farmers, a world which replaced a two-day week with a six-day week involving heavy seasonal drudgery and dulling, brutal routine from daylight to dark. Peasant existence is the price of civilization, where men struggle to retain their humanity and women become baby machines. This farming world includes those townsmen and urban parasites which grew up around the system of an agriculture.

How can we shift away from being world eaters and world destroyers, from making the earth's surface into a replica of our own desperate fears? What possible method or technology could one imagine applying from any kind of wisdom about the past to our present situation, which seems to be dominated by an attitude grown up in the last few thousand years? We already have the knowledge of the creation of synthetics—non-food synthetics—that previously were produced on the land but would allow us to remove some forty percent of the present cultivation of the earth and therefore to generate that much additional space which could be included in wilderness. We have new microbes and know of yeasts and bacteria which can be fed upon human sewage, petroleum, and cellulose products in our environment, and which can provide for us every needed nutrient—and which can be produced in much more restricted surroundings. This requires a sophisticated, elaborate technology which is new and different from anything man has done before, not going back simply to an economy of hunting and gathering as a way of life, or suggesting that we throw off our clothes and pass out spears at the door. By freeing the land we could then move toward a recovery of the possibilities of being human.

To do this means abandoning of the hopeless destructive industrialization of the countryside and of agribusiness. By reorganizing human experience—separating that which is man-made and cultural into very highly polished and developed cities on one hand and wilderness on the other—we end the blurred areas of rural countryside and suburbs. In time we could recover a smaller population, but for the next century there is excellent evidence that the microbes we know of could support a world population of nine billion, three times the present world population, and still allow for the release of some sixty percent of the world's surface.

These techniques and this information are already available. It would take a bold and dramatic overturn of some of our thinking for us to apply it. Leopold himself took the bold step from ecology to philosophy. The example of his life says that philosophers all the way from Plato through Aquinas have used some word meaning "to hunt"—like *venator* or *thereutes*—to explain what they do. The philosopher, in the person of Ortega y Gassett, has also reminded us of this. He says: "The only man who truly thinks is the one who, when faced with the problem, instead of looking only straight ahead toward what habit, tradition, the commonplace, a mental inertial world would make one presume, keeps himself alert, ready to accept the fact that the solution might spring from the least foreseeable spot on the great rotundity of the horizon." The sturdy hunter in the field seems to us to be at the other extreme from the urbane scholar in his study, and yet here is a convergence of the thinking of these two men. But perhaps they have started to mend the split between the things of nature and the things of mind not by unifying them but by discerning relationships. Our task, is reconnecting and re-establishing lines between them, in rethinking the world of the future as something other than the trajectory of humanization of the whole planet. Leopold the hunter, Ortega the philosopher, show that it can be done, and that what we can recover is not only a liveable world but the recovery of ourselves. □

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOSEPH W. MEEKER

PROLOGUE TO AN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

William Faulkner liked to repeat a Chinese fable about a time when cats were the dominant creatures on earth. After centuries of failure in their attempts to solve the ethical problems faced by a dominant species, the cat philosophers decided that the only practical solution was to give it up and to select from the lesser creatures some species that would be "optimistic enough to believe that the mortal predicament could be solved and ignorant enough never to learn better." According to Faulkner, "that is why the cat lives with you, is completely dependent on you for food and shelter, but lifts no paw for you and loves you not; in a word, why your cat looks at you the way it does." Humans have persisted, optimistically and ignorantly, in their belief that ethical problems can be solved, disregarding several thousand years' accumulation of evidence to the contrary. Though we may not yet be ready to follow the cats' example by abdicating in favor of some other species, we might be wise to pay some attention to those animals whose behavior and environmental relationships can teach us something about our own.

We have often used animals to illustrate minor truths about social behavior in children's stories and moral fables, but we seldom take them seriously as sources of philosophical insight into human ethics. We have preferred to believe that ethical law comes from outside the world of matter, nature, and experience. The image of Moses on his mountaintop receiving the tables of the law from an extraterrestrial God is typical. So is Plato's Analogy of the Cave, where ideas of good and evil are shown to be beyond sense perception and far above the environment of life in a realm that the Greeks called "meta-physical," beyond physical existence. The assumption that ethical principles are supra-environmental in origin is one of the strongest legacies of Western thought. Though its ancient Hebrew and Greek forms may have lost credit in recent centuries, it persists in modern fantasies about superior beings from outer space and in religious conceptions of a world soul which regulates experience from some Beyond.

It has become possible in our time to consider the development of a true environmental ethic based upon our experience of events in the world, upon the evolutionary history of our own and other species, and upon the new knowledge of ecological principles which govern the relationships of organisms to their natural environments. Such an ethic must emphasize the survival of our species, rather than spiritual salvation or transcendence; its methods must provide for adaptation to the natural environment, rather than conquest of it. This discussion is intended to survey the resources available for thinking about such an environmental ethic and to suggest a few of its principles.

Environmental ethics must confront two large problems: humans' relationships to other humans (intraspecific ethics), and humans' relationships to the plants and animals of the natural environment (interspecific ethics). Ethology offers insight into the first, and ecology into the second.

The Ethology of Intraspecific Behavior

Humans no longer need be confined by the habit of thinking that the relationship between animal and human behavior is merely one of analogy. Men are not only *like* animals, they *are* animals. Human evolution from animal origins is not merely a theory; it is a natural process for which we have as much evidence as we have for gravitation or the laws of thermodynamics. And it has become apparent that the recognition of man as an animal does not simplify or reduce man's stature in the least. The newly revealed world of animal behavior is extraordinarily complex and often as sophisticated as anything humanity has devised. We are not degrading man by comparing him with animals; rather we are slowly realizing that all these centuries we have been grossly underestimating the complexity of animal life.

The study of animal behavior in its wild state has become systematic within the past few decades. Biology no longer need limit itself to the study of anatomy and physiology, but has now begun to perfect the interdisciplinary techniques of ecology and ethology as legitimate scientific inquiries. These are the first biological approaches which hold promise of revealing new knowledge about the complex interrelationships which govern organic life in all its forms. Their purpose is to see the various forms of life in context with one another, not in isolation. This context, of course, also includes the life form that we call humanity.

These two new features of biological thought—the recognition that man is an animal and the development of techniques for the study of all animal relationships and behavior—have now made it possible to begin at last to disassemble the barrier wall that has separated the world of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man from the world of nature. So far, only a little has been learned about the common denominators of human and animal ethical behavior. But already there is enough evidence to justify the hope that an ethical continuum may one day emerge showing man as an integrated part of nature rather than a unique exception.

Sex

Sexual behavior seems to have been highest on our list of biological interests, perhaps because we have always been most confused about this aspect of our moral behavior. The pair bond—*marriage*, in our ethical tradition—is not a uniquely human invention, but is practiced by many other species. Some of them make it work much better than we do. Among "marrying" animals such as wolves, geese, and many bird species, fidelity is assured simply because all extramarital sexual interests disappear permanently once the pair bond has been formed. The resulting mated pair is a permanent family unit dedicated to the rearing of young and the defense of its territory, and it normally survives all external sexual enticements or even the death of one of the partners. As Kinsey and many others have demonstrated, human attempts to enforce the family bond by ethical laws and customs have not been nearly so successful. For six millenia our laws and religions have forbidden us from coveting our neighbor's wife, yet we covet nonetheless. As a species, we seem to hanker for sexual variety no matter how much we believe we shouldn't.

On the other hand, the happy promiscuity of many primate species, such as baboons and howling monkeys, seems unsuited to our needs, however great its playboy attractions may be. Since our offspring require so many years to mature, we seem to need the permanent family security that only the pair bond can assure. Other mating arrangements such as free love or polygamy have never proved very satisfying or satisfactory to us, though several other animal species have made them work rather well.

After thousands of years of muddling through, we remain in ignorance and guilt concerning our own most appropriate mating behavior. Our confusion may result from our moralizing attempts to repress and control instinctual sexual needs. We have generally used our superior mental ability to suppress—rather than to fulfill—instincts, and the cost has generally been paid in neurosis. If we were to devote our efforts to discovering what the sexual and mating needs of our species in fact *are*, rather than trying to enforce what we think they *should be*, perhaps we would begin to discover forms of sexual behavior that would both satisfy us and assure the successful survival of our kind, as other species have done.

Ownership and Social Organization

Property and territory, we have been surprised to discover recently, are as important among animals as they are among men. Animals, too, are attached to their land, and they form themselves into social groups which provide internal security and defense against intrusion. Many patterns of differing social and territorial behavior exist among animals. Each territorial species, however, is unified in its attachment to a form of territorial and social organization which suits its particular needs and enhances its opportunities for biological success.

In some cases, the social organization favors a high degree of individuation and fosters strong authoritarian leadership. Other animal species seem to emphasize internal coöperation, distribution of power among members of the group, and concerted selfless action in the defense of territory. An enormous variety of types of social organization is beginning to emerge from contemporary ecological studies. It is becoming increasingly clear that human social organization is not a uniquely human invention, but the product of evolutionary influences similar to those which have governed the development of other animal societies.

But again we must ask, is there a form of social organization which answers most effectively to the needs of the human species? Our enlarged brains have long exerted themselves to create utopian societies which we have then tried to impose upon our fellow man, and nowhere have we caused ourselves more pain and destruction than in these efforts. We have tried everything our mentality and imagination can devise, but we have not yet tried to assess the complicated social needs of man as a biological species.

Aggression

Perhaps the most pressing need today is to learn more about human aggressive behavior. We have the capacity to render our species extinct unless we find alternatives to the patterns of intraspecific warfare which have dominated civilized history. It is evident now that we have long been a predatory species. Living, for humans, depends upon the ability to kill as clearly as it does for lions or wolves. But lions and wolves, like almost all predatory species, normally limit their killing to prey animals and are equipped with elaborate ritual precautions to prevent the destruction of their own kind. Humans appear to be unique among predators in their enthusiasm to destroy their own species. Perhaps we can attribute our unusual behavior to some genetic deficiency which may lead us ultimately to join the rest of nature's failures in the biological graveyard of extinction. Or perhaps our willingness to kill ourselves, like so many of our other problems, is something we have devised by misusing our enlarged brains.

Predatory animals act according to two different patterns of aggressive behavior which appear to be governed by separate neural substrates in the brain. One kind of aggression is designed to kill animals of another species for food. The death of another animal is the sole object of this behavioral pattern, and it is of course necessary to the survival of any meat-eating predator. But such killing behavior is virtually never directed against another member of the predator's own species. Aggression is of course rather common among members of the same species, but its purpose is social, not nutritional. Intraspecific aggression establishes the relative social status of animals as they relate to one another in families and social groups, and rarely results in death. Predatory ethics *require* that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

animals of other species be killed, and at the same time *forbid* that members of one's own species be killed.

Human ethical traditions generally agree with that distinction, though we seem to have found many ways of behaving which contradict it: warfare, legal death penalties, and murders of infinite variety. Our justifications for killing other human beings all seem to derive from the rational human mind, not from our genetic heritage. We have invented schemes which permit us to treat other humans as if they were members of another species—rats, dogs, snakes, pigs—as if we could deceive ourselves into believing that their murder was therefore proper. Other predatory animals have been unable to create such illusions because they lack our complex brain, so they kill other species only in order to eat, and fight with members of their own species without killing. We would be wise to study that distinction.

Species-Specific Ethics

Yet we must remember, too, that wolves are not humans any more than wolves are birds. There is no more wisdom in judging men according to the behavior of chimpanzees than there would be in judging gorillas or wolves by the same standards. Behavior appears to be species-specific, and all analogies are likely to be misleading.

We need a concerted attempt to discover the basic patterns of behavior that are peculiar to the phylogeny of the human species. To accomplish this, it will be necessary to sort out the instinctual patterns of human behavior from the cultural overlays and contradictions that civilization has deposited upon them. As Konrad Lorenz has often said, "Man is by nature a creature of culture"—that is, civilized human culture is now an integral part of the biological evolution of our species. Our culture is also the most quickly adaptable of all our features, providing we can decide in which direction we want it to go. We must find a way to distinguish between those cultural ideas which seek to repress or destroy our instinctual needs and those which seek to fulfill them. That is a tall order, but it is also one we have never before been in a position to undertake.

Our present sciences of human behavior—sociology, psychology, anthropology—have scarcely addressed themselves to this problem; they seem to be preoccupied with the environmental determinants of human ontogeny and have largely overlooked the phylogenetic implications of evolutionary biology. Psychology took an evolutionary view of human behavior under Freud and Jung (when very little knowledge of animal behavior was available), but has since limited itself largely to the study of human cultural environments as the sole sources of psychic and social life. And philosophy has all but given up the attempt to understand human behavior and devoted itself to the study of symbolic logic. So the only truly new ideas in ethical thought in our time have come from an unexpected source: ecological biology. It is biology that seems most likely to show us how to study man as he is: his origins, the phylogenetic sources of his behavior, and his role in the economy of nature.

Ethical Bankruptcy

We are accustomed to hear that our ethical tradition is bankrupt. Nietzsche made the point very effectively almost a century ago, and existential philosophy has since accomplished a rather thorough accounting of our moral poverty. In one of Sartre's essays—"Existentialism Is a Humanism"—our ethical predicament is symbolized with wonderful clarity and simplicity. Sartre tells the story of a young French student in 1940 who must make a choice between staying with his mother, who needed his help to survive during the war, and serving his country by joining the Free French Forces. Sartre examines the entire bulk of ethical tradition from Christian morality through Kant's categorical imperative and is unable to find an applicable moral principle on which the young man can base his decision. He concludes that "no rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do," and so advises the boy: "You are free, therefore choose." Sartre's point is that man is "condemned to be free," that the traditions of moral behavior we have inherited from the civilized past provide no dependable guidance for our behavior, and so we must invent our morality as best we can in particular circumstances.

Sartre is, I think, correct in his judgment of our inadequate tradition of philosophical ethics. I would only add that this young man's problem was also *created* by the same ethical philosophy that failed to solve it. The young man's choice seems difficult only because he has been taught that such an abstract concept as "France" really exists. A nation is a thoroughly mental construct for which there is no genuine biological counterpart. The relationship between mother and child, however, is one of the world's strongest bonds because it is firmly rooted in both instinct and experience for all of us—and for most other mammals as well. A million years of evolution went into the development of that young man's bond to his mother; the ideas of "nation" and "patriotism" are only a few hundred years old, and can hardly compete with the mother-child relationship unless we happen to be as morally confused as Sartre's young friend was.

Similar instinctive bonds tie us to our friends and companions, just as they do other animals. Ernest Hemingway put it directly and accurately during World War II when he reputedly said: "If I ever have to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I have the courage to betray my country." Hemingway's choice rests upon the deep emotional attachments to individual persons derived from the evolutionary history of the human species and confirmed by recent observations among other animals as well. As an ethical posture, it is millions of years old. Friends are more real than nations.

Alyosha's Choice

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this theme is to be found in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov.* Just before the famous "Grand Inquisitor" chapter, midway through the novel, Dostoyevsky presents a discussion between Ivan, the intellectual idealist in the novel, and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alyosha, who is Dostoyevsky's version of what Jesus might be like if he were living in the modern world. Ivan offers Alyosha a hypothetical choice: Suppose you were given the power, he says, to create a perfect human world in which mankind would be happy and peaceful and all human needs would be satisfied, but that in order to do that you would have to begin by torturing to death one innocent child. Would you take the job on that condition?

This is a basic ethical choice between the welfare of all humanity and the suffering of one helpless child. Certainly the child's death would be a moral crime, yet when it is weighed against the welfare of mankind it seems a small price to pay. From Plato through Thomas Jefferson or Karl Marx (whichever you prefer), our ethical tradition has placed the welfare and brotherhood of mankind above all private suffering. The most respected humanistic values would be realizable if Alyosha agreed to kill the child and create the perfect human society.

Yet Alyosha, the Christ figure, rejects the thought of torturing a child, whatever good might come of it for society. He is hard pressed to explain his choice, and finally takes refuge in Christian doctrine which says that justice is in the hands of God, not man. His answer fails to explain *why* it is ethically unacceptable to him to build a good society beginning with an evil act. Most people agree with Alyosha, but it's not easy to explain why. Ivan's offer makes good sense and Alyosha's rejection doesn't. Ivan affirms humanitarian ideals that most of us believe in, and Alyosha is an archaic Christian saint whose beliefs few today can share. It is not merely Dostoyevsky's subtle artistry that puts us all on Alyosha's side, but something much deeper.

Perhaps we agree with Alyosha because he affirms in us an innate prohibition against the murder of a child. That prohibition is deeply rooted in the phylogenetic origins of our species, and is not merely a moral doctrine to which we have given our conscious assent. We are at a loss to explain it rationally, just as Alyosha is. But when we examine the other animal primates—not to mention many other animals as well—we find that they share with us the same solicitude for young members of their own species. Few innate patterns of behavior are stronger than those commanding that young mammals may not become objects of aggression, but must be protected against such dangers, whatever the cost.

Ivan's proposal for the good of humanity, on the other hand, is a thoroughly civilized notion. His ideas of human perfectibility, of dignity and honor, of justice and logic, all presuppose the history of human consciousness from which they are derived. Most of Ivan's beliefs originated with Greek classical philosophy, and are at most three thousand years old in the history of our species. They are conceptual formulations of rational human thought which we can accept or reject according to our own cultural backgrounds and intellectual preferences. None of them can be clearly confirmed by reference to our primate ancestors or to other animals.

Dostoyevsky's ethical problem thus looks like a conflict between rational and innate human ethical behavior. Intellectually and rationally, we can see the wisdom of sacrificing an innocent child in order to attain the happiness of all humanity. Emotionally, "all humanity" is meaningless to us and is decidedly subordinate to our concern for the safety of the child. One would have to be a fanatically dedicated idealist to muster the mental strength to act in contradiction to such powerful innate human emotions. Dostoyevsky's novel is about people who use their minds in that way and destroy themselves and others in the process.

Domesticated Ethics

It is possible to disrupt the normal ethical behavior of an animal species by imposing special conditions and restraints, either mental or environmental. When we domesticate animals we change their ethical behavior, just as we change their physical features, by selectively breeding for behavioral traits which will be convenient to human purposes. Normal killing or food-gathering behavior and defensive aggression are suppressed when wild animals are domesticated, and must be replaced by the provisions humans make to feed and fence their animals. Patterns of courtship and mating behavior are destroyed, and a premium is placed upon those animals who will breed promiscuously at the farmer's will without time wasted in ritual mating ceremonies or battles fought among males to earn the right to mate. Domestic animals are bred for minimum aggression and maximum submissiveness, which generally means that they never reach normal stages of maturity for their species. Domestication weakens the intraspecific bonds among animals, subverts normal social structures, and destroys the animals' usual relationships to their natural environments.

When we domesticate animals, we attack those patterns of ethical behavior which human moral philosophy has often admired: sexual selectivity and fidelity, social order consistent with individual liberty, the skills of self-support, defensive strength against attack, and strong social leadership. If such animals appear to us "beastly," it is often because we have made them so.

Is mankind a domesticated species? Have we used the power of civilization to attack and suppress instinctual patterns of behavior which evolved to increase the chances for survival of our species? To a certain extent, the answer may be yes. Civilized morality has tried hard to control certain basic patterns of human behavior, especially those relating to sexuality and aggression, and we seem to have paid a heavy price in neurosis, as Freud and his followers have reminded us.

The contemporary breakdown of many traditional ethical patterns long fostered by our culture may be a disaster for our species, as some think, or it may be the beginning of a liberation from some of the restraints of self-domestication among humans. Certainly we need to find ethical principles and practices which will agree better with the biological requirements of our species and which will serve our interest in surviving. Our prospects may depend upon how much we are able to learn in the near future about the behavior of the animals around us and the animal that is within us.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Interspecific Ethics

The ethical problems raised by mankind's relationships to the non-human environment are as thorny as those we have so far considered, and they are rooted as deeply in our cultural history. Again, both the Greek and the Judeo-Christian origins of our civilization agree that the world exists in order to be useful to mankind, and that we enjoy special privileges over nature but bear almost no ethical responsibilities for maintaining natural processes. We have gloried in our ability to bend and shape the world to suit human interests, but we have shown little concern for shaping human behavior toward greater compatibility with the natural environment.

Our ethical tradition has been humanistic and theological, not environmental. Changes are now occurring in this old pattern, and not merely since ecology has achieved some public notice. Quite apart from the social movements which have responded lately to environmental crisis, our ethical thinking for the past few centuries has moved us ever closer to the natural world as a source of ethical guidance. A new environmental ethic has been in the making for several centuries, and the current environmental crisis has only helped to hasten its development.

The Death of God

Few traditional models of reality have survived intact the scathing critiques ours have been subjected to during the past four centuries. Religion has perhaps suffered most, or at least most obviously. The twins born of the Renaissance, modern humanism and inductive science, proved apostate to religion because they insisted that man and his physical world are our only legitimate concerns, and that both are essentially subject to human control without need for divine assistance. Once those views had been established, it was inevitable that a Nietzsche would appear soon to announce the death of God; we can only be surprised that it took until the 19th Century. Since Nietzsche, demolition of the ancient religious edifice has proceeded rapidly under the blows of existentialism and with the generous coöperation of scientific and economic materialism. The resulting rubble is both God's tombstone and a monument to the divinity of man, or as Dostoyevsky's Kirilov puts it, "If there is no God then I am a God." Man took the place of his dead god.

Another of Dostoyevsky's characters, Ivan Karamazov, anticipates Nietzsche with a similarly provocative syllogism: "If there is no God, then everything is permitted." When faith in an ordering deity was rejected, so was faith in the systems of moral and social law which had been built largely upon religious foundations. The vacuum left by the disappearance of divine ethical standards and goals has yet to be filled by any of the systems that have competed for allegiance during the past century—nationalism, communism, industrialism, individualism, aestheticism, escapism, and a host of lesser persuasions—even though each offers its followers a substantial guide to social and ethical behavior. These ideologies have tended to exclude one another, each one insisting upon its own principles, and none catholic enough to replace Catholicism, none persuasive enough to capture man's imagination as Religions once did.

Modern technology has been for many the clearest sign of man's divinity. Since Leonardo dreamed of damming rivers and flying through the air, engineers have shared and compounded his vision even beyond Leonardo's outlandish schemes. The technological West has lately all but freed humanity from the dangers and inconveniences of natural existence—or at least created the illusion of this freedom. Clever man seems to have provided for himself better than God could, and man accordingly deserves worship. The worship of industrial technology has thus become a new humanistic religion professed by many scientists, politicians, businessmen, and ordinary citizens for whom no other kind of religious belief is possible.

Unfortunately, the adoration of technological man has led to serious damage of our biological environment. Its ideology has also weakened irreparably our faith in traditional philosophical and religious values. Both body and soul, we are cut off from systems of order which have sustained us in the past, so who can wonder that we feel badly equipped for the future?

The Paradoxes of Utilitarian Ethics

Utilitarian ethical systems assume that the results of human action are predictable and can be weighed in advance against several alternatives. The utilitarian ideology behind the "Green Revolution," for instance, assumes that it is "good" to provide food for starving human populations in developing nations, and "good" to create new foreign markets for American chemicals and agricultural technology—and that both of these results will follow from the application of highly technological agriculture in developing nations. It predicts that many human advantages will accompany the more efficient exploitation of agricultural land, and that humanity will, on the whole, be happier and more peaceful thanks to an increased food supply. Such unfortunate losses as wildlife habitat, genetic diversity among food crops, changes in the cultural traditions associated with Oriental agriculture, the disruption of the economic and political systems of the countries affected by increasing their dependency upon complex technologies—all of these are considered minor sacrifices compared to the greater goods that will predictably be accomplished in the interest of human dignity and relief from starvation. They are a bit like sacrificing a child in order to attain a perfect society.

To most Americans this utilitarian argument seems very convincing; we have heard and accepted it all our lives. Such concepts of "the greater good" justified our great-grandfathers' appropriation by force and by stealth of the lands of American Indians, because we thought that the Indians were using the land less efficiently than we could. We have used it to support the damming of our rivers, the extinction of many animal species (e.g., "pests and predators"), the introduction of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, the creation of highway and airline systems, the encouragement of mining, and the development of urban industry.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We hear the utilitarian argument daily in our debates over such projects as oil pipelines and generating plants, where we are asked to consider the "tradeoffs" among good and bad results of such projects, or to accept a "cost-benefit analysis" which will predict the results of our technological activities. The predictions made by such systems of analysis, of course, have generally been confirmed by subsequent events. Our expectations of the positive effects of technology have regularly proved to be correct. The problem is that these developments have also created *other* effects which were not, and could not be, predicted.

An impressive list of "benefactors of humanity" according to utilitarian principles can be compiled from the records of the Nobel Prizes and the many other rewards we bestow upon those who have discovered new ways to serve human health and happiness. But a close look at that list will also reveal that it identifies the sources of many discoveries which have threatened the continuation of life: such things as atomic energy, the endless growth techniques of economics, DDT, genetic controls over organic life, the medical breakthroughs which have encouraged population explosion, and now the Green Revolution.

All of these creative "inventions" were motivated by the desire to make the world a better place to live and to increase human welfare and dignity. How well have their predicted effects been demonstrated by actual events? Very well indeed, but still the record is dismal, largely because each of these "advances" has had many consequences which could not have been anticipated. How could a dedicated servant of humanity like Louis Pasteur have predicted that his invention of the science of bacteriology would help to increase human populations and lead toward greater human suffering than medical technology could possibly alleviate? How could the atomic scientists who invented a bomb to end the bloodshed of World War II predict the political, social, and psychological disruptions that would create near chaos in an atomic age? And who can predict at all the widespread results likely to follow from such unprecedented services to humanity as the Green Revolution or a cure for cancer? Our utilitarian science "in the service of humanity" is wonderfully successful, but each of its successes seems to have produced new and unexpected threats to life. The experience of the past four hundred years of Western history suggests that our most energetic efforts to achieve the good life have also robbed life of much of the meaning that less inventive, less idealistic humans have found in it.

The Imperfectibility of Man

The utilitarian philosophy has also been built upon a faith that human beings are perfectible and that they will grow in goodness as they are released from bondage to nature by an increasingly efficient technology. As machines perform their tasks ever more perfectly, mankind is expected to use the resulting leisure and freedom to cultivate reason, goodness, and beauty. As machines become more *mechanically* efficient, humans should grow more *ethically* efficient, gaining in wisdom, judgment, and compassion according to the degree of their relief from drudgery and fear.

Again, there is little evidence from recent history to support such predictions. Rather, an opposite result seems to have followed. We have come to think of ourselves much as we think of the machines that were supposed to liberate us. We look increasingly to elaborate laws and legislative programs to manipulate human behavior, and to education and the public media to produce desirable mental states on a large scale. We tinker with social structures and human consciousness as if they were complicated computers which will surely produce the right answers if only we learn how to program them properly. Absorbed as we are in this task, we scarcely notice how miserable many individual lives are, or how gross our ethical sensibilities have become. Side by side with our visions of a perfected humanity are such modern events as ten years of meaningless destruction in Southeast Asia, Hitler's murder of six million Jews, the wholesale extinction of many animal species, the pollution of land, sea, and air on a worldwide basis, and the many lesser instances of human crime and moral degradation which punctuate our newspapers and motion pictures, reminding us that there are millions of neurotic and morally confused human beings who suffer somewhere in the hidden crannies of our shiny social machine.

Stuart Hampshire, a very wise British philosopher, recently (in the *NYR*, Jan. 25, 1973) offered a critique of utilitarian morality which identifies its fundamental flaw. Utilitarian ethics, he says, teach us that we can and ought to use and exploit each other as we use and exploit any other natural objects. The utilitarian ethic has convinced us that our techniques for exploiting and manipulating nature are applicable to the exploitation and manipulation of mankind as well. What utilitarianism failed to predict, however, is that both nature and humanity are subject to degradation and pollution by these same techniques. We have corrupted ourselves by the same methods we have used to corrupt the processes of nature.

Hampshire's penetrating essay concludes with a simple and sobering judgment which some may find pessimistic: "Moral progress . . . is not to be expected except within very narrow limits." The utilitarians since Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill have "looked for an historical transformation of human nature through new moral reasoning, [but] this has not occurred and is now not to be reasonably expected." So the utilitarian dream of a conquered nature and a perfected humanity can now take its place among the many other idealistic fantasies which have produced disappointing and destructive consequences.

Evolution's Revelation

If Hampshire is right, what alternatives are left to us for ethical guidance that will better meet both human needs and the requirements of a healthy natural environment? One genuinely creative moment of recent intellectual history occurred a century ago with Darwin's articulation of the principles of evolution by natural selection. As materialism and atheism barred us from God, evolution introduced us to our nearer neighbors, plants and animals. The recognition that we are animals lets us look upon ourselves not as divinity or superman, but as an organic

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

participant in a natural world, and as a species with an appropriate situation in the natural environment. Since Darwin, natural history and the increasingly sophisticated disciplines that have emerged from it, especially modern ecology, have revealed an intricate panorama of natural relationships and interdependencies. The spectacle was always under our noses, but it had escaped our notice while we were gazing at the stars or at our own flattering image in a highly polished technological mirror.

One sure consequence of ecology is already apparent: the complexity of our thinking about the world must increase to accommodate orders of intricacy which we have never before imagined. We have grossly oversimplified the world in our belief that we were the only important creatures in it. Here, too, the dangers of zoömorphizing man are as great as those of anthropomorphizing or even ignoring nature. Man's capacity for symbolic and abstract thought does set us apart from other animals, though we frequently exaggerate that difference or mistake its significance. When we study man we must deal with him not only as an animal but also as one with a unique capacity for manipulating his habitat, for comprehending his environment, and for undertaking distinctively human imaginative and spiritual experiences. Whether it fosters pride or despair, the mind inescapably dominates both the acts that will shape our survival and the durability of the ecological environment upon which all life depends.

Is the human mind subject to evolutionary growth and adaptation? Can the human mind cope with environmental changes so as to improve the prospects of man's survival within a stable biosphere? We cannot assume an affirmative answer to either question. Many species' specialized organs apparently have become maladaptive under transformed environmental circumstances and thus have contributed to extinction of the species. To assume *a priori* that our brain ensures evolutionary "privilege" on into an indeterminate future is to indulge a biological complacency that is both perilous and thoughtless.

Man's fate over the long, evolutionary haul, as much as from day to day, will be determined by what happens in the human mind and in its collective product, cultural history. Our best prospect as a species lies in the adaptability of our mental activities, not of our bodily processes. The hope of rapid adaptive mental change is where our best talents lie. But changes in human mentality customarily proceed at a glacial pace. Several centuries often intervene between the appearance of new ideas and the cultural and intellectual changes appropriate to them. Although improved communications seem to have greatly accelerated this process since the Renaissance, substantial agents of lag still prevail. For example, the dissemination of new ideas is often controlled by those who most resist evolutionary change. Further, the virtually unmanageable array of demands upon us results as much in perplexity and irresolution as it does in revision. Most ironically, the very flexibility of the human mind often leads us not to adaptive clarity and decision but rather into confusion, as we broadmindedly examine so many sides of a question that we find ourselves unable to sort out the resulting intellectual contradictions. We are in such a state now about "ecology," frustrated by our inability to choose at a time when critical choices must be made. We are bewildered even by the search for the intellectual wherewithal from which to make such choices. What out of our past is pertinent? What in our predicament is even within our means to change? The guidelines of sustained coherent thought, let alone decision, seem indecipherable. But then, we have barely begun.

Adaptive Intelligence

We properly take pride in human intelligence, and we have customarily expected our intellect to solve our ethical problems. I believe that to be a reasonable expectation, but only if we use our intelligence differently than we generally have in the past. In Faulkner's last novel, *The Reivers*, intelligence is defined in a way that illustrates what I mean. Faulkner ranked several animals according to their intelligence, as follows: "I rate mules second only to rats in intelligence, the mule followed in order by cats, dogs, and horses last—assuming of course that you accept my definition of intelligence: Which is *the ability to cope with environment: which means to accept environment yet still retain at least something of personal liberty.*" I think Faulkner is right: intelligence is not merely the ability to be trained, or to comprehend abstract symbolisms, or to invent tools and technologies, or to manipulate the world for our advantage. Rather, it is a measure of our ability to understand the conditions of the environment into which we have been accidentally born, to accept those conditions, and to adapt ourselves to them.

An environmental ethic requires that human behavior must be modified to agree with the ecology of the world, not that the world must be rearranged to suit human desires. The appropriate changes will not mean a simplification of human life, but far greater complexity than we have known in the past, both in human life and in the diversity of plants and animals with whom we share the natural environment. We'll have to learn more about what the world is really like and spend less time dreaming about how we would like it to be if we could change it. And we will have to find a way to extend *e pluribus unum*, our formula for strength arising from diversity, to include more than just human diversity by applying its principle to other plant and animal species and to the ecosphere as a whole.

Adaptation to environment is more than just a defensive technique of survival in an endangered circumstance. It is a creative ethic which requires that all of our scientific and imaginative powers be directed toward encouraging a more durable equilibrium among the various forms of life. The hero of Thomas Mann's final novel, Felix Krull, built his life around a principle which might well provide the foundation for a new and imaginative environmental ethic. Krull's motto was as follows: "He who really loves the world shapes himself to please it." We may be able, with luck and some imagination, to do better than those Chinese cats who gave up and left their problems for some other species to worry about, and instead learn how to shape ourselves in order to please the world. That, I think, is the meaning of an environmental ethic. □

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A STORY BY STEPHEN DIXON

Darling?"

I go to her room, turn on the light, stand by her bed.

"Could you turn me over, please?"

I turn her over on her back.

"And get my pills?"

I go to the kitchen, turn the sink tap on and wait for the water to run cold.

"And don't forget a glass of water."

The water runs cold. I bring the pills and glass of water to her bed.

"I hope the water's cold."

I hold the pills out on my palm. She points to her mouth, sticks out her tongue. I place a pill on her tongue, hold the glass of water to her lips while I hold up her head with my hand. She swallows. Then the second pill and water. She nods. They're both gone. She opens her mouth to show me: all gone.

"Could you turn me over, please?"

I turn her over on her stomach. I turn off the light.

"Thank you."

In a minute she's snoring. In a few minutes she's asleep. I leave the room. I get the mail which has been pushed through the mail slot of the front door. Around noon she'll call me again.

"Darling?"

I go to her room and raise the shade. She's still on her stomach. She can't turn over by herself though occasionally still tries. She can't walk. She can't sit up or lie on her side for more than a few minutes without it causing her a great deal of pain. She never gets out of bed.

"Could you turn me over, please?"

I turn her over and give her today's mail. From the kitchen I get her soap, towel and basin of water so she can wash her mouth, face and hands.

"And you know what else."

I get the bedpan out from under the bed. While she's on it I cook all of today's food. I bring her a tray of food, take the bedpan out from under her, empty the basin water into the bedpan and the bedpan into the toilet. I wash my hands. I help feed her what she can't feed to herself, give her her afternoon pills and water, go to the front door and get the morning newspaper which is on the stairs of her building's stoop. Most of the time it's on the sidewalk in front of her house and only once a month is one of the two daily newspapers, delivered by the same newspaper delivery service, on her front door mat. I give her the morning paper. While she reads it I take away the opened mail, tray and basin with soap and towel, have my lunch, wash the tray, eating utensils and bedpan, hang up the towel, place the soap and basin in the cabinet under the kitchen sink, separate the bills from the correspondence and ads in the mail, put the ads in the kitchen garbage pail, the correspondence in a box in her livingroom desk and make out and have her sign the monthly checks for the grocer, druggist, doctor, utility companies and newspaper delivery service and place the last check under the doormat. I put away all the things I washed, do today's shopping and give the grocer and druggist their checks, return to the house and put away all the things I bought and get the afternoon paper at the front door. It's been carefully rolled up and bound with a rubberband and left on the doormat. I give her the afternoon paper. After she finishes her paper I place both newspapers on the pile of newspapers in the kitchen corner. Twice a month I tie the newspapers into three or four stacks and set them in front of the house with the week's garbage. I turn on her bedroom light and pull down the shade. I turn her over and turn off the light. She'll sleep on her stomach till around six.

"Darling?"

I go to her room and raise the shade. It's nearly dark.

"Could you please turn me over?"

I turn her over, heat her supper, turn on the light, give her her pills, water and supper, help feed her, take away the tray, pull down the shade, give her the bedpan, book she's been reading and needlework, have my supper in the kitchen, clean the tray, eating and cooking utensils, take away the bedpan and empty and clean it, put away everything I cleaned, place her book and needlework back on the dresser, turn her over and shut the light.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I think tomorrow you'll have to bathe me and change my bed."

Of course tomorrow I'll have to bathe her and change the bed. She doesn't have to remind me. I sponge bathe her and change her bed every three days unless she's had an accident, and then it's every three days from the day of the accident. She hardly ever has an accident. The last was three months ago. Before that, six months ago. Before that, I don't know. I wasn't here. I never asked. She wouldn't tell me besides. I was living with my wife and child in another city at the time. Why'd I ever leave them? Because my wife threw me out. Said if I couldn't provide for them I couldn't live with them. Said they'd get more from Welfare by living without me than I ever gave them when they lived with me. I tried to earn enough to stay. For a while I had three jobs at once. But minor jobs, poor-paying jobs. I have no profession or trade. In the morning I worked as a life model for a group of artists. In the afternoons as sweater salesman in the men's section of a department store, but I got fired when I tried sticking some of the store's money in my pocket. On weekends I cleaned up the laboratories of a university's science building, but lost that job when they heard I'd been fired for stealing money from the department store. The artists kept me on despite my theft, but it wasn't enough wages for my family to live on. I went to several cities to find a well-paying full-time job, thinking that if I got one I'd get a nice apartment and have my family move in with me. But I never found any other work than part-time modeling for poor artists and cleaning up labs and naves for universities and churches that couldn't pay very much. Eventually I landed in this city. I answered a newspaper ad the day I arrived: *Young man to help elderly woman. Room and board plus adequate pay.* I called her with one of the last coins I had. She said come right over. There were three other applicants when I got here, two not that young so they were disqualified from the job. The third was much bigger and stronger than me, but too young and good-looking, she said. She told him he wouldn't stay the month: "You'll use my place as a flop-house till you catch the eye of a pretty countergirl, then leave me high and dry without even a day's notice." I was hired on the spot, given the room next to hers. Besides all the duties I mentioned, I do the laundry, see the doctor in and out of the house, and answer her call to me every night around ten.

"Darling?"

I go to her room, turn on the light, turn her over on her back.

"My evening pills, if you don't mind."

I go to the kitchen and turn on the cold water tap.

I bring her the pills without water, I don't know why. Maybe so she'll have reason to fire me. I don't know if I want to be fired, but I think I do. This drudgery. I've had the job for seven months. This loneliness. If she fired me I might find a more interesting job, one that would pay me enough to afford an apartment and send for my wife and child. But I don't have the courage to quit, as not only wouldn't I be entitled to severance pay but there's a good chance my next job will even be worse than this.

"You intentionally forgot the water."

I nod. She's right. Why try and fool her? I go to the kitchen, again let the water run cold. But no. I turn the warm water tap on, and bring her a glass. She drinks it with the first pill.

"It's warm. Now you know I like it cold. What's got into you today?"

I raise my shoulders, go to the window and raise the shade.

"You know I like the shade down when it's dark."

I lower the shade.

"The cold water, please?"

I go to the kitchen.

"You forgot the glass."

Paul Zimmer

ZIMMER WITH LESTER UNDER THE MOON

Poor Lester, the bastard son of
The moon, afraid of his father,
He thrashes in his blankets,
High bones grinding on low ones,
His teeth rasping like forewings
Of crickets.
In his sleep
Lester tells me of his fear;
He thinks the high wind
Sniffing at the cracks between
The clapboards and peeling off
Shingles is his father
The Moon.
I cannot sleep
Near his somnolent terror.
I step out into the cold wind
And let it suck my breath.
No clouds and, as I watch
Stars divide and multiply,
The moon arcs. It is so full
I could pluck and eat it.
Its light dusts the fine bones
Of the cactus and coyotes.
I feel things expand in its presence.

Lester cannot love this strength
And splendor, he prays for eclipses
Or cloudy nights. I fear for him.

I don't want to worry anymore.
I want to lie down cold in
My own skin like a snake and
Never be afraid for anyone again.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I return to her room, take the glass of water from her hand.

"Only half a glass of cold water, as I already took the first pill with the warm."

I go to the window.

"Please don't raise the shade again."

I empty the glass on the floor.

"Please clean that up."

I go to the utility closet for a mop, leave the glass on a shelf and return to her room.

"Please don't forget the cold water. I want to go to sleep."

I turn off the light.

"But not before I've had my pill."

I turn on the light, turn it off and on repeatedly.

"Please?"

I leave the light on.

"The cold water?"

I begin mopping the floor.

"First the cold water, darling."

I get the glass from the utility closet, go to the kitchen, bring her a glass of cold water and spill it on her bed.

"You did that intentionally. Now you'll have to change my bed. Also my gown. And you still have to get me a half glass of cold water. And then finish mopping the bedroom floor. That's all you have to do. Besides turning me over and shutting the light."

I turn her over.

"I didn't mean for you to turn me over right now."

I turn her over on her back.

"And for mercy's sake, don't now shut the light."

I shut the light.

"I just said, 'For mercy's sake, don't now shut the light.' "

I turn on the light. I mop the floor. While I'm mopping she says "All right, finish mopping the floor. At least get that out of the way. And once that's done, let me repeat for the last time what you still have to do, though I don't want you to start doing them till I tell you to. First of all, get me a half glass of cold water. Second, get clean sheets and a clean nightgown and make the bed and change me and then turn me over, turn off the light and go to sleep yourself. No, you can do what you want in your own room after you've done all these things, but first get all these things done."

I finish mopping the floor. I go to the kitchen and bring her a half glass of cold water. She drinks the water down with the second pill.

"Good. Now the linens and gown. But don't forget to return the mop."

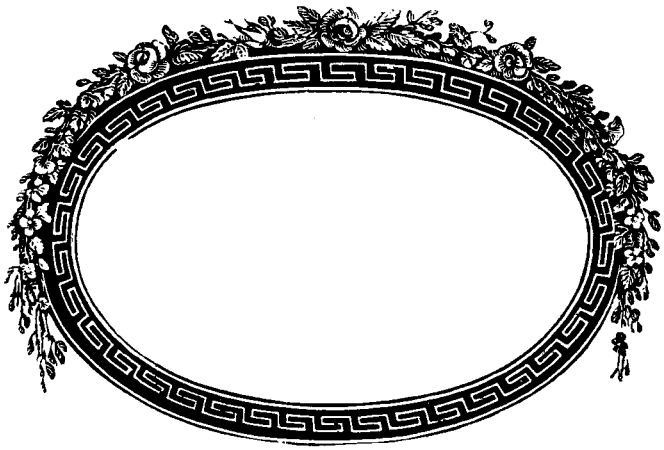
I return the mop to the utility closet, wring it out above the utility sink, hang it up, get a broom from the closet and sweep up the kitchen. I continue sweeping into the hallway and then into her room. I sweep under her bed.

"Please don't sweep under my bed."

I sweep the side of her bed, the blanket over her feet, the sheet across her shoulders.

"Please get the clean bed linen and gown."

I return the broom to the utility closet, get a dustpan from the closet and with my hands and feet push onto it



the piles of dirt I left in the two rooms and hallway I swept in, empty the dustpan in the kitchen garbage pail, place the dustpan back on its closet hook, get two clean sheets and pillow cases out of the linen closet and return with them to her room. I begin changing her bed with her in it. It's something she taught me how to do from her bed the first day I got here, and I've been able to do it without her instructions ever since. After rolling her from one side of the bed to the other to get the old sheet off and new sheet on, I tuck in the top sheet, change the pillowcases, lift her head, stick the two pillows underneath and gently lower her head to the pillows.

"Finally you do something right. Thank you. Now the blanket and my gown if you don't mind."

I raise the shade.

"Please lower the shade."

I go to the kitchen, fill a glass with warm water, go to her bedroom and empty the glass on her.

"Now you'll have to change the bed again. It's a good thing you didn't put on the blanket. Please get an entirely clean set of linens. But before you do, lower the shade."

I lower the shade. Then I raise and lower it repeatedly till she says "Will you please keep it lowered. Then get the linens, change the bed for the last time tonight, get my gown, help me change into it, turn me over, place the blanket on top, dump all the old linens in the washing machine, shut the light and get out of this room."

I go to the laundry room with the old linens, stick them in the washing machine, add a cup of detergent, go to the adjoining cubicle, turn on the hot and cold water spigots of the cubicle's utility sink which is attached by long rubber tubes to the washing machine, and return to the laundry room and start the machine.

"Darling?"

I go to my room and sit on the bed. On my dresser is an empty frame. Yesterday I removed the photograph of my wife and child from the frame and tore it up. Then I began putting the photograph back together again and have half of it done now. It's like a picture puzzle which is getting easier and easier to solve. I have most of my son's face, none of my wife's, all of her knees, calves, ankles, both her socks and shoes and all the grass they're sitting on. When I get the photo together again I'll cover it with cellophane tape and stick it back in the frame.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Darling?"

I throw the frame against the wall. It splits in two, the glass shatters on the floor. Of course I'll never be able to get the glass together again, while the frame I can. I get a hammer and from the tool chest in the garage and start to fix the frame.

"Darling?"

I go to her room.

"I hope you're not planning to use that thing on me."

I forgot I was holding the hammer. I return to my room, go to the kitchen, bring her a glass of water and place the water to her lips while I hold out the pills.

"I already took my pills, thank you."

I forgot about that too. I return the pills and water to the kitchen, dry the glass and put it back in the cupboard, get the mop out of the utility closet and begin mopping her bedroom floor.

"You've already done that."

That's right, I had. I raise the shade.

She shakes her head.

I pull down the shade and turn off the light.

"Darling?"

I turn on the light and turn her over.

"Not yet, please."

I turn her over on her back, get fresh linen from the linen closet and begin changing her bed.

"That's right. Very good. You know how to do this extremely well. I'm sure you'd be able to get a hospital orderly or nursing home job anytime you want, just by the way you can change a patient's bed."

I finish changing the bed and shut the light.

"Not before I'm in a fresh gown, on my stomach and covered up."

I turn on the light, sit her up, slip off her gown, bring the gown, linen and mop to the laundry room, take the washed linen out of the washing machine and stick it in the dryer, place the gown, used linen and detergent in the washing machine, start both machines, return the mop to the utility closet and get a nightgown out of her dresser. As I'm pulling the nightgown down over her head I notice her chest. She has many red blotches there, a new growth, long scars on her neck and back from her last operation when she had several bones removed. She's still very ill. The doctor told her she will never again be able to leave a bed. She never speaks directly of her illness or incapacity, though she's often mentioned how much she misses taking walks and simply being well. I hug her. I want to hug her tighter, but fear it might hurt her and even cause injury. I cry on her shoulder and she pats my back.

"There, that's okay. The job can get you down sometimes—I know. And I'm really not getting any better to look at or easier to handle. And what I say can occasionally get anyone down. You're extremely sensitive in many ways. It's not healthy for you to be in this kind of work, though I suppose it's better for the people you take care of. You're a little eccentric at times as we all probably are, but deep down you're very kind. Just try and deal with me and my situation the best way you can."

I kiss her shoulder and cheek, finish dressing her for sleep, lie her on her back, turn her over on her stomach, cover her up and tuck in the top sheet and raise the shade.

"Please lower the shade. Leave it up then. What harm will it be but a little morning light waking me up much sooner than I planned. I'll simply pull the covers over my head and fall back to sleep that way."

I pull down the shade.

"Keep it down if you wish."

I raise the shade.

"It's fine that way also."

I turn off the light.

"Goodnight, darling."

I turn on the light and lower the shade.

"Then I'll sleep with the light on and shade down."

I raise the shade, lower it slowly, tear it down and kick it around and pick it up and smash it against the window sill.

"If you're through, I'll again say goodnight."

I tear the shade into many pieces, toss them around the room, get the broom from the utility closet, sweep up the shade pieces and dump them in the garbage pail in the kitchen, sweep up the broken glass in my room, dump the glass into my wastebasket and empty the basket into the garbage pail, bring the broom back to the utility closet and return to my room with the basket.

I work on my photograph. I find my wife's head. I haven't located her neck yet, so I've no place to put the head. In the photograph my son sits on my wife's lap, his body concealing her belly and chest. I find her neck attached to her shoulders, place this piece and the head on the bottom half of the photo I've put together so far. The photo's now complete for my purpose. I get a roll of cellophane tape from the desk in the livingroom and tape the front of the semi-complete photograph.

"Darling?"

I go to her room, reach down for the shade string, reach up for the string, remember there is no shade, turn off the light, return to my room and tape the back of the photograph.

"Darling?"

I go to her room with the roll of tape and fasten several strips over her mouth.

"Dlung?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I turn on the light and return to my room.

"Darling?"

I go to her room, turn off the light, stand above her bed and look down at the back of her head made visible by the streetlamp light.

"Turn me over, please?"

I turn over the bed.

"Ring the doctor, please?"

I call the doctor, sit by the front door till I hear his car pull up, open the door as he rings the bell. He sets down his bag, gives me his coat and hat, goes into her room with his bag, comes out without it.

"She's had an attack. And broken a bone in the fall. I'm afraid it looks very bad." He calls for an ambulance.

I put on his coat and hat and leave the house. I stand in front of her building. The air's cold. The sky seems empty of stars. Both curbs are packed with parked cars. The doctor's is the only car double-parked, its back and front red emergency lights flashing. An ambulance pulls into the street with its siren going and double-parks behind the doctor's car. The siren's turned off. The two ambulance men run around to the back, pull out a stretcher and go into the woman's house with it. They come out bearing the woman on the stretcher. The doctor, wearing one of the woman's fur coats, walks beside her holding her hand.

"Wait."

The bearers stop sliding the stretcher into the ambulance. The doctor says push it all the way in as they have to get to the hospital fast.

"Wait."

"All right. Do as she says. Wait for a second, but no more."

The woman beckons me to her with her finger. One of the bearers braces up the back half of the stretcher which extends out of the ambulance's rear door. The other bearer lights up two cigarettes and sticks one in his co-worker's mouth. The doctor rests the woman's hand on her chest, takes his hat off my head and brushes it off. The woman takes my hand in hers.

"Don't forget to turn off all the lights. And shut and lock all the windows. And make sure all the stove burners are off. And the furnace is switched off. And that all the electrical plugs are pulled out of the walls. And all the faucets are turned off tight. Then lock the door and leave the house. But leave the house. Drop the keys through the mail slot. I'll have the doctor call the newspaper delivery service and post office to temporarily suspend service. He also took my keys and left your week's wages and two weeks' severance pay on my dresser. You may take my valise if you feel it'll be of more use to you than your own. It had my initials on it so I suggest you blacken them out. If I survive all this and am discharged from the hospital, I'm

REG SANER

DREAM SONG

A black porch, American Gothic
like dead cake, laced with knobby finials,
carpentered scroll-work, vine leaves
thickening the wood.
The secret man and woman dress well
but talk in hushes as if afraid. Yet not
enough to pour that blood into the ground.
It stands there, in a pair of Mason jars.

I sleep on to overhear,
certain their blood is mine disguised—
or my wife's. I study the people I'm made of—
or her, asleep in the bed next to this dream
I'm trying to break off.

Is this color what I slip away nights to think?
Sooner or later to assume her fate
as my own? To spill myself?
Or to awaken and find her chopped?
Tall round gore, squat and warm
in blue glass walls. Maybe that.
On the other hand I recall razor blades
kept in my desk drawer for years.
Edges for small blue mistakes.

Zinc-lidded vessels on a wooden top step.
A drift of whispers. Blood, dark
and rich, plumping itself in my eye—
a language I can't quite make out. My darkest
speakers miming a fake scene.

More and more awake, I sit
the edge of my bed, an abyss faded
with voices. As its man and woman dwindle
toward the roots of my brain
my mind's eye dwells till it washes out.
In my veins an emptied porch
clots over with leaves. A sealed desire
cools and thickens in jars.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

going to place another notice in the newspaper for a man needed to help an elderly woman. I'll stress that he be middle-aged and reasonably educated and strong, and this time I'll insist on references I can verify. I don't think I'll be confined that long where by the time I'm discharged you'll have become middle-aged, so you needn't apply for the job if you see the ad. Goodbye."

She lets go of my hand. The doctor signals the bearers to slide the stretcher all the way into the ambulance and for me to give him back his coat. He hands me the fur coat, puts his own coat on, climbs in after her, sits next to her, puts on his hat and adjusts it and takes her wrist pulse. The bearers step on their cigarettes, climb in front, turn on the siren and the ambulance drives off. I watch its revolving roof light till it's just a blinking speck in the distance. Then it disappears. I don't know if the ambulance turned into another street or continued straight on. I look up. The sky still seems empty of stars.

I go into her house, hang up her coat, put on my jacket, take the money off the dresser and stick it in my pocket. She didn't include half of the two weeks per year vacation pay for the seven months I worked, but I'm lucky to get what I got. I remove the shade from my bedroom window and install it on hers. I lift up her bed, make it, pick the pieces of cellophane tape off the floor, pull down the shade, pull out the lamp and radio plugs, shut the light and go to the kitchen, put the pieces of tape into the garbage pail, make three stacks out of the corner pile of newspapers, bind them with cord and cut the cord with the scissors I get out of the utility drawer, return the cord and scissors to the drawer, carry the pail and newspaper stacks outside and leave them in front of the house, go to the laundry room and take the first batch of linens out of the dryer and fold them up, take the nightgown and second batch of linens out of the washing machine and stick them in the dryer, turn the dryer on, put the folded linens back in the linen closet, turn off the hot and cold water spigots of the utility sink in the cubicle, pull out all the electrical plugs in the livingroom, my bedroom and kitchen, and make sure the faucets in the bathroom and kitchen are turned off tight.

I go to my room and try to piece together the top half of the photograph. The last piece I insert to make the top half complete shows a barn on a hill with part of a mountain behind it. I tape both sides of the top half, tape the two halves together to make the photo complete, nail the frame together, put the photo in the frame, make my bed, dust the room with an undershirt, put the roll of tape back in the livingroom desk, get my valise out of my closet, bring it outside and leave it on top of the newspaper stacks as its handle is cut off and seams are torn, get my toothbrush out of the bathroom holder and woman's valise from the hallway closet, put my clothes, toothbrush, framed photograph, book and wallet inside the valise, zip it up, get paint, paintbrush and turpentine from the paint rack in the garage, shut the furnace off in the garage and lock the garage from the inside, black out the woman's initials with the paint, moisten the undershirt with turpentine and clean the brush with the shirt, return the paint, brush and turpentine to the paint rack and hammer and unused nails to the garage tool chest, put the shirt in the furnace, take the gown and linens from the dryer and fold them up, pull out the electrical plugs of the washer and dryer, place the linens in the linen closet and gown in her dresser, shut and lock all the windows, turn off all the lights, leave the house with the valise, lock the front door and drop the keys through the mail slot.

I walk downstairs and away from the house. Halfway up the street I remember I didn't check to see if the stove burners were off. I race back to the house with the valise, go around to the back and look through the kitchen windows. Two burners I used to heat up her supper tonight are still on. I put the valise down, find a large flat stone and wedge it between window sash and sill and with all my might I try prying the window open. The window springs up and the pane breaks from the force of the window hitting the lintel. The wind knocks a napkin holder off the kitchen table as I'm pushing the glass chips off the sill. The holder lands on the floor. A paper napkin falls out, floats above the stove, lands on one of the lit burners, ignites, one part of it quickly disintegrating while the burning part flies higher and ignites a window curtain. By the time I climb through the window, a kitchen cabinet has caught fire. I spray water on it directly from the sink faucet, but now the wall is ablaze. I leave the kitchen through the broken window, pick up the valise and am running to the fire alarm box on the street when I hear sirens and see fire trucks turn the corner and pull up in front of the woman's house. A fireman pushes me aside so the hose won't be dragged over my feet. Another fireman breaks open the front door and goes into the house, comes out and says "Nobody's home from what I can tell." I stand across the street with a neighbor and watch the firemen try and put the fire out and the house burn to the ground. The firemen pull in their hoses and leave. A policeman is left behind to guard the debris.

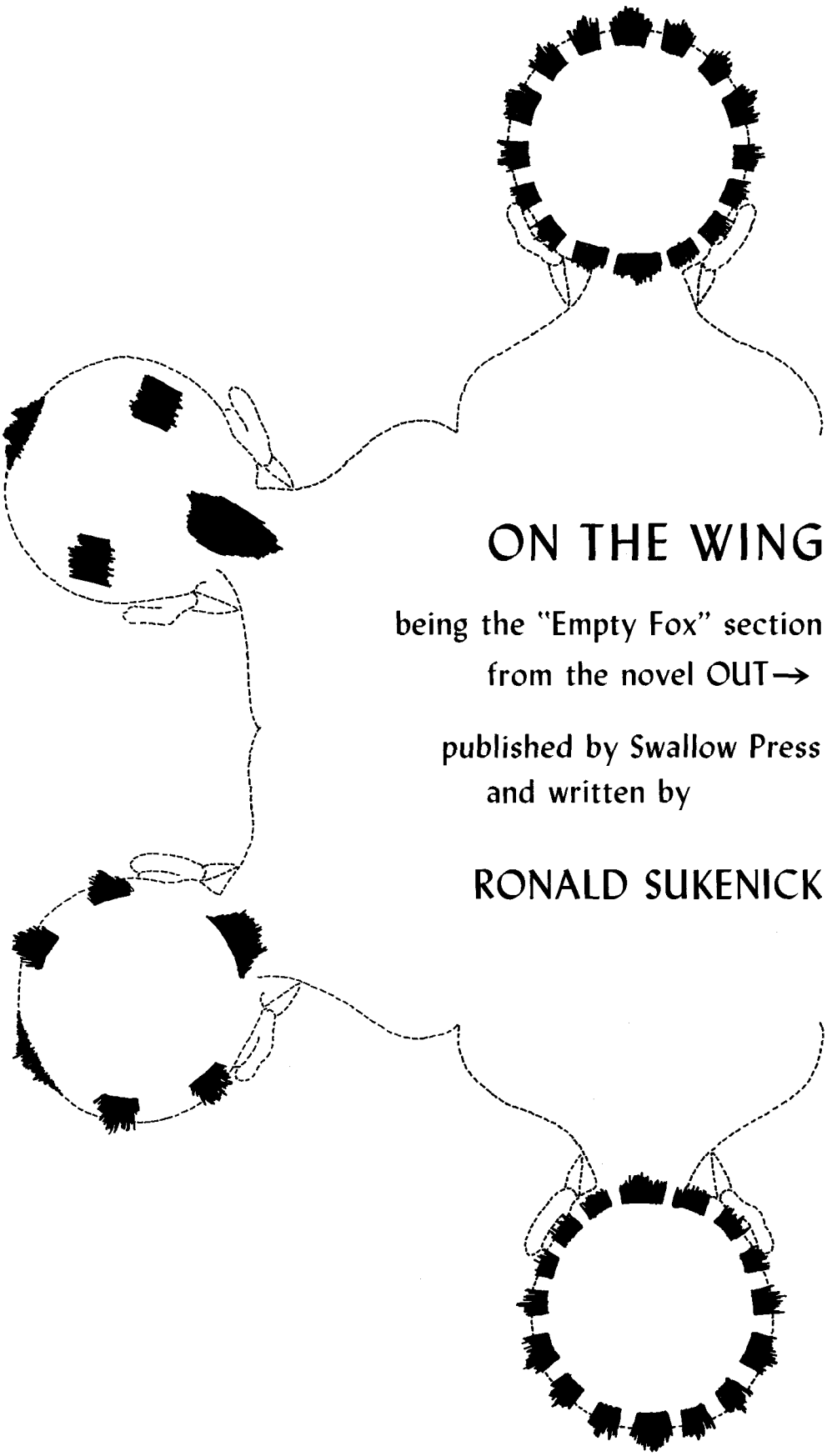
"Terrible," the neighbor says to me and goes into her house.

I pick up the valise and walk several blocks till I come to the avenue. The avenue leads to the boulevard that leads to the highway that takes you out of town. About two miles away the highway hooks up with the superhighway that goes across the entire country, one of its last exits being the city my wife and child live in and the one I left nearly a year ago. Maybe my wife will take me back. I'll promise to work very hard, never steal from a store, try and get three jobs again if that's what it takes to keep us going, even four if I can. A car comes along. I stick out my thumb.

"Whereto?"

But what for? I've most of my seven months' wages, so I can afford to take a plane. Why lose time on the road when I can be home tomorrow and already looking for a job? My savings aren't much but enough for us to live on for a couple of months if it takes that long to find work. If it takes longer, she'll throw me out. I know her well. I wouldn't blame her a bit. A man should provide for his wife and child, no matter how tough it is for him to get and hold a job. I smile my thanks to the driver, wave him on, cross the avenue and wait for a hitch or bus to the airport. But it's late and by daybreak no other cars have come. □

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



ON THE WING

being the "Empty Fox" section
from the novel OUT→

published by Swallow Press
and written by

RONALD SUKENICK

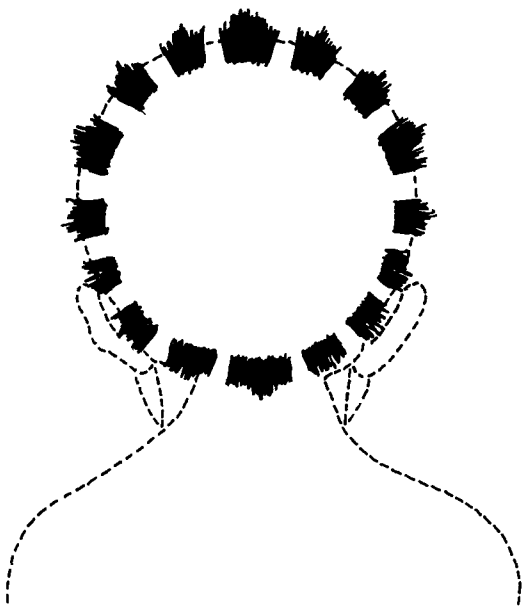
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ON THE WING

All this happens in Chamberlain South Dakota which is on the east bank of the Missouri River the Missouri is wide enough around here let me tell you get a ride in a semi across to Reliance all high barren bluffs on the other side that's where you leave the farms behind and the prairie

starts rough rolling scrubby cattle ranges and you start seeing them cowboy hats and there's always high mountains somewhere over the horizon and that's where the wind starts streaming glaciers rip out of the north slam into the highway pushing cars over a whole lane I get a ride in a

pickup truck have to just about lie flat in the bed not to get blown away I tell you that wind was aiming to blow South Dakota over into Nebraska and maybe the whole damn mess into the Gulf of Mexico we go through Kennebec Presho Vivian Murdo in Kadoka we stop to give a ride to



this Indian he leaps in huddles down into his denim jacket expressionless the truck cuts through the Badlands I jump from one side to the other to see the colors incredible formations far out he sits in the bottom of the truck eyes closed in Wall we stop for gas he opens his eyes. How-kola

get your lousy bad prahna workshoes off my forty-two dollar Tony Lama boots he says.

Sorry I say I move my feet.

He nods.

I'm Ron Sukenick he holds out his hand we shake Empty

Copyright © 1973 by Ronald Sukenick

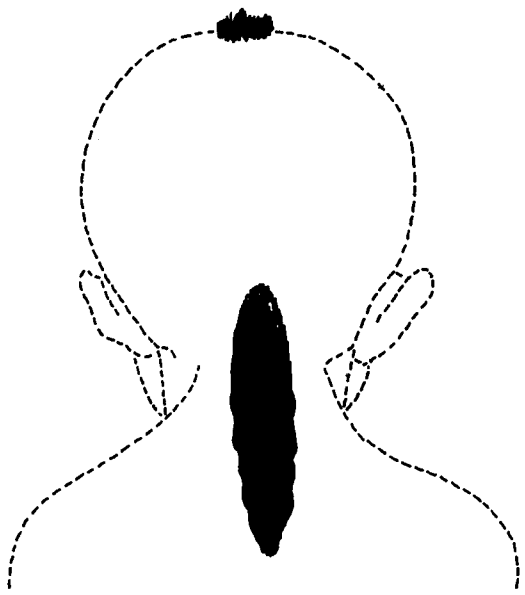
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fox he says the truck starts by now the sun is going down the eastern sky is grey the moon is shining the west still full of light sky deep blue suddenly Empty Fox gets up stares intently over the cab of the truck into the sunset the east gets darker there are a few stars now the western horizon

explodes behind us black for a while we speed along on the edge between day and night the sky ahead luminous then darkness gulps us we careen toward the receding light as toward a final exit Empty Fox still staring into the west he touches my arm points there he says I see a line of jagged

darkness thrusting into the sky like the mountains of doom Black Hills says Empty Fox I go there the dark tunnel stretches to the horizon the exit recedes shrinks disappears it's night the wind dies ahead clusters of lights float in the darkness.

Coming into Rapid City says Empty Fox we stop for a hitchhiker he climbs into the truck very stiff we pull him up a short fellow with crew cut pasty pudgy face not young he has a small valise the truck drops the three of us on the outskirts of Rapid City the little fellow opens his valise



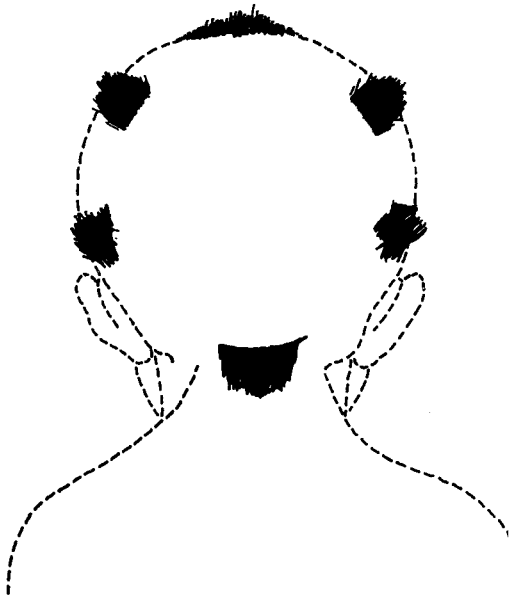
starts working with some struts and colored paper very quickly he has this box kite set up red and blue with small wings he gets in and takes off rises to the top of a tall cottonwood tree and gets off on a branch on one side starts climbing disappears on a branch opposite he's going to fall

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

disappears his head pokes out around a distant branch he falls reappears at the very top of the tree disappears around to the other side a foot comes out from behind a branch a leg an arm waving then he reappears next to us on the ground I hug him he seems rather grumpy pulls away

closes up his bag walks down the road he's a clown he's going to the circus a van pulls up looks like an old bakery truck full of silly teenage girls we throw them off drive into town we get off here I say we get off at a corner in front of a bar the van moves on we can see through the rear win-

dow that the driver's seat is empty on the back of the van it says *the spirit moves us* this is a dream Empty Fox's dream or maybe my dream the truck drops us off on the outskirts of Rapid City let's have a serious discussion says Empty Fox. What's your ambition.



I want to write a book like a cloud that changes as it goes.

I want to erase all books. My ambition is to unlearn everything I can't read or write that's a start. I want to unlearn and unlearn till I get to the place where the ocean of the unknown begins where my fathers live. Then I want

to go back and bring my people to live beside that ocean where they can be whole again as they were before the Wasichus came. That's why I like to travel this way. I have money for a car I have been in many movies you see my boots also my stetson very expensive the best. I carry

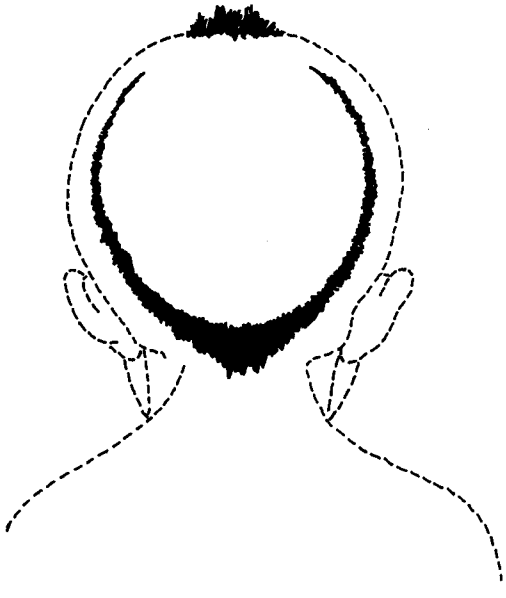
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nothing with me when I need something I buy when I finish with it I throw away these lousy Wasichu things anyway my Indian things my father keeps for me. Anyway I very much love good things even when they are Wasichu things. Anyway I like to travel hitching that way I don't

know the way to go I let Mr. Road take me. Maybe Mr. Road knows the way to go maybe not but I don't know it. I been all around the world that way Japan India I studied yoga but I never find the right way. Anyway I know I will find because I have the old Indian ways my father teaches

me my father is a medicine man very old he remembers Crazy Horse. Mr. Peyote helps me sometimes I take peyote since I was six my father gives it to me I can see things for example I saw you coming out of the Corn Palace in Mitchell this morning I wasn't there. Sometimes I have

visions like the vision you saw in the truck just before about the man who flew up to the tree that was my vision only I saw it through you. That vision has seven meanings only none of them are important what's important is the feeling of it you can't understand this. Anyway that was



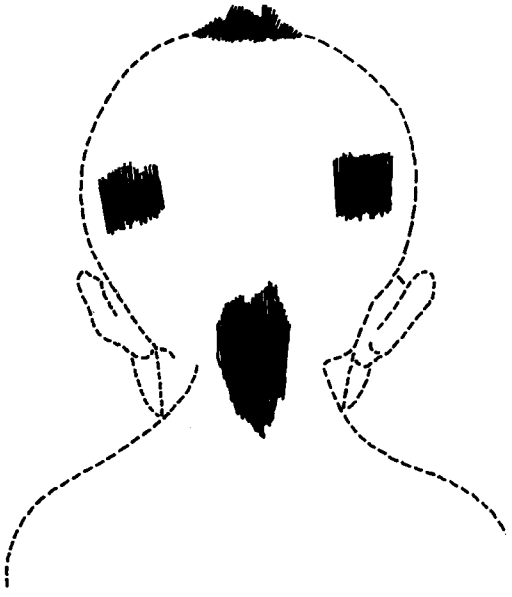
your feeling in the vision. When I travel like this hunting the unknown I don't think you don't hunt Mr. Fox by thinking you become Mr. Fox. Anyway I don't think I let things think through me that way I travel very fast you can't understand this. Anyway if Mr. Road tells me to go

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

another way before then I go another way but he tells me to go to the Black Hills again I don't know that till I'm in the truck so I go to the Black Hills again which is the sacred hunting ground of my people a very holy place where once there were many wapiti. Also I recognize you

in the truck from my vision before but I don't know about you because I don't like Wasichus very much they murder Sitting Bull they murder Crazy Horse they murder many many of my people women and old men and babies at Wounded Knee they break their treaty and steal our sacred

hunting ground to make another Disneyland and litter its mountains with those big statues of your lousy bad prahna presidents they break the sacred hoop of our people and they're never satisfied you know all this. Anyway I don't know about you till I have my vision through you and I



learn something in that vision so tomorrow I rent a car and we go to the Black Hills together. Now I have to think a minute because when I have a vision I like to make a song or picture about what I want to remember in it.

We walk along on the shoulder of the road the wind

dead silence ahead the lights of jetliners landing and taking off soundless at an airport on the edge of town above many many stars more silence the quiet is like a bandage on a wound.

This is a translation in Lakota it's much better says

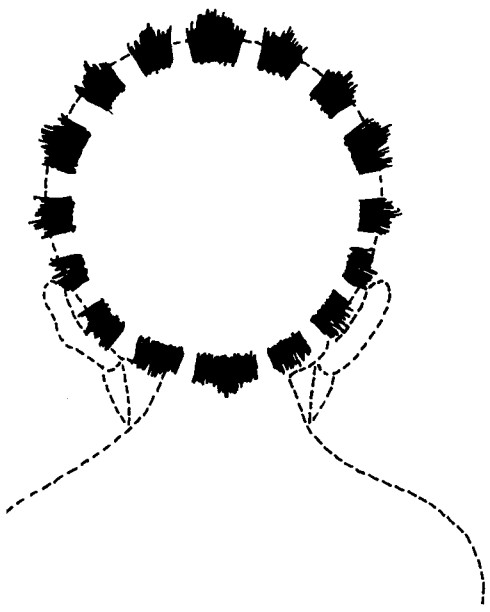
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Empty Fox he recites in a slow practical chant
Without the wind
The kite is dead
With it everything
Is possible.

That night we stay in a Y next morning Empty Fox comes around driving a rented Cadillac we head up route 16 into the Hills around here they call them hills they get way up over seven thousand feet even now these mountains very strong medicine says Empty Fox there are shining

caves caves that breathe water runs uphill. A little north is the geographical center of U. S. this is one of the magic places where everything comes together. Around us dark delta shaped pines cover the slopes with their geometry we pass many motels concessions billboards that say *gravity*

mystery area see water run uphill anyway says Empty Fox the Wasichus make Disneyland of all this so they can sell it they get Indians to pretend they're Indians they make believe these beautiful mountains are beautiful they pretend that magic is magic they make believe the truth is the



truth otherwise they can't believe anything. There is a place with a billboard of a mountain in front of the mountain you Wasichus can't see without pretending to see so anyway you don't believe it. Anyway that's why you all have cameras you're not friends with your eyes only with

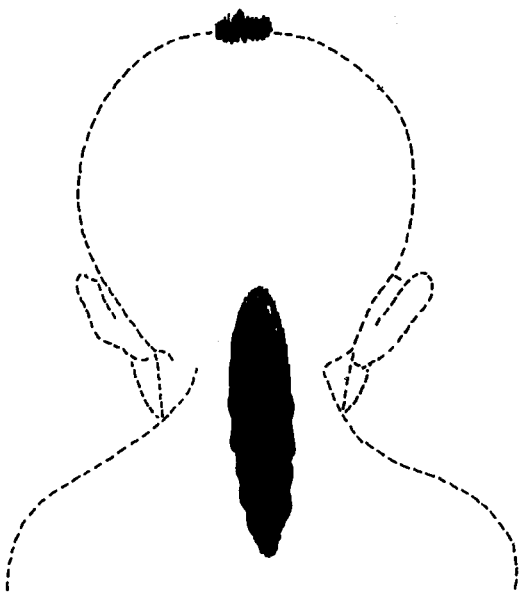
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

your minds you can't understand this.

The wind is up again springing out around curves slamming across hairpin turns the Caddie shuddering over long granite drops we stop on a shoulder amid weird pinnacles massy involuted formations for a distant view

of the intruding presidents those are your gods you can't see them unless they wear those masks says Empty Fox. The old gods are still here and I can see them just by looking he waves his arm toward a creased and involved granite cliff across a canyon where I see mittens boxing

gloves elephants intestines vaginas then suddenly peering and disappearing in the rockface strange ghostly faces decayed bloated withered creased by age distorted brutish skulls some of them whole figures hunched and twisted sad mournful vindictive some horribly angry changing all



the time I jump back hah says Empty Fox. You see and you're scared you're right to be scared the earth is very angry she cries to her brothers the wind and the fire and to her sister the ocean already the wind is rising and the ocean sings back

Everything will wash away
It is good
A new race is coming

and the fire sings

Everything will burn to ash

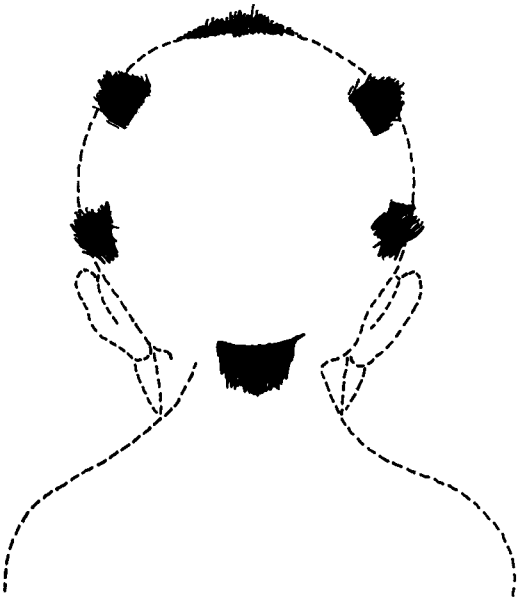
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is good
A new nation is rising
and the wind sings
Everything will sweep away
It is good

A clean spirit is breathing
They hear a thrashing in the woods wapiti says Empty Fox an elk emerges in the underbrush on the other side of the road antlers like bloody candelabra strips of skin hang ragged from their branches makes a maddened plunge

toward a tree trunk impact of antlers shakes the tree he rubs them against the trunk plunges again in places you can see the pink-white of exposed horn shedding his velvet a sign says Empty Fox the elk tosses its antlers and thrashes off into the woods they drive further up into the mountains

wind still buzzing around them come to a high clear lake reflecting rock formations like huge thumbs granite peaks far end of the lake dammed by a procession of giant rocks they stop at a campground beside the lake empty except for a large camperbus at the other side Empty Fox gets out



he moves slowly across the campground first in one direction then another an abstracted look on his face eyes vacant it's as if he's being moved around the clearing circles in on one area moves backward sideways stops begins to stamp the earth with his feet softly at first harder very hard as

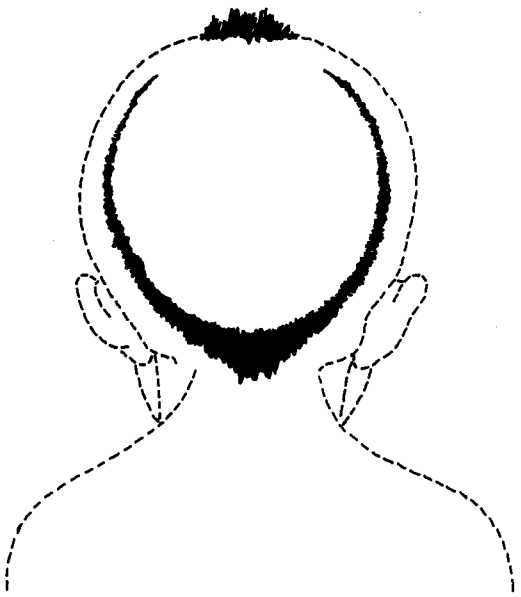
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

if trying to drive his feet into the ground stands legs apart waves here. Bring the tent I get the tent out of the trunk we set it up driving the stakes deep against the wind unroll sleeping bags Empty Fox looks at the sky snow he says.

How do you know.

The way things sound. The way things smell. Birds flying low. Now you have to make friends with this place the rock here is granite very old anyway older than Rockies these trees all spruce. Come we go on trail we walk around the end of the lake the wind is glacial I'm freezing now

look around on ground the ground is covered with chunks of glittering stone pink translucent green deep red silver mostly agate mica quartz here says Empty Fox. Many beautiful stones in these mountains also silver gold he spits. For that the Wasichus break treaty now you take a stone.



Any stone.

No not any you take a stone that speaks to you I look around carefully what do you mean speaks to me.

When you see a woman and right away you fall in love before she looks before she says words she speaks to you.

You pick a stone that has that feeling.

I look around finally pick up a large jagged pink stone glittering many-faceted with glassy fractures orange layers deeply translucent faulted to its heart I feel an indefinable connection with it I hold it up to Empty Fox good this is

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

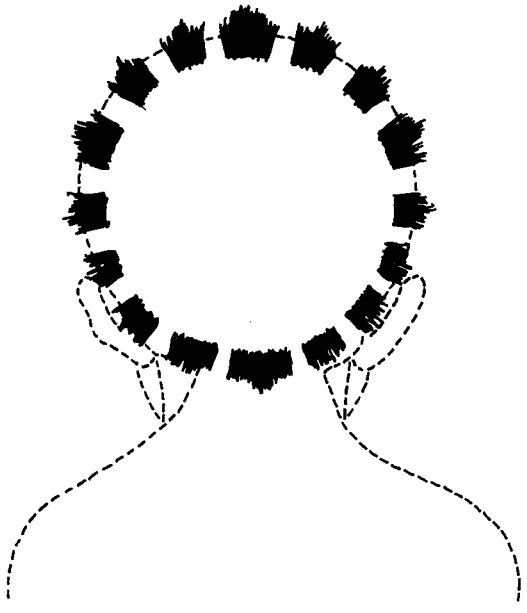
your stone it's good luck we continue along the trail along the base of hollow cliffs through passages under tall rocks that lean on one another or hang precarious odd shapes figures faces giants petrified on the brink of life Empty Fox stops in a green bowl of cliffs that dwarf the tall pines now

you go back to our place you make friends with your stone he points at the mountains to one side I go up to Harney Peak. This is the highest peak till you come to the Rockies a very strong place he's wearing rings I haven't seen before on his left hand a silver ring with an irregularly geometric

figure of a bird indented in its face on his right a heavy turquoise ring with a turquoise bluer than I've ever seen the same color as the deep mountain sky above us only flecked through with veins of silver and gold I have to make friends with the wind he says he moves on up the

trail I go back to camp bending against the wind.

I sit hunched in front of the tent I look at my stone smell the pine smell listen to the wind I look at my stone turn it over and over weigh it in my hand put my nose to it rub it against my cheek lick it bite on it look at it some



more hold it up to the sun feel it warm in my cupped hands eyes closed run my fingers along its sharp edges try to remember its shapes map its faults its facets its idiosyncracies make it shine in the light this way and that I look up. Something is different dark green of pines more intense

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blue of sky deeper granite rocks sharper denser the picture postcard lake more convincing the ground more solid I love this place I'm flooded with love for it. I lie down and put my cheek against the earth breathing deeply slowly then a strange thing happens. I feel heavier warmer my

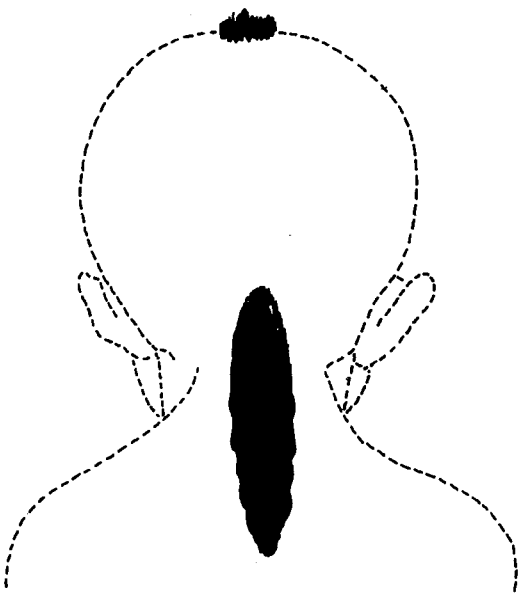
body flows tingles quivers glows I feel the gravity that connects me with the earth passing through me like a current like a responding love the sun hugs me the sun is in love with me I get up breathe deep I can't understand this. Then the words come into my mind I don't know

where they come from the secret is that there is no secret.

Seen the buffalo yet a smiling portly man in a red nylon jacket and orange earmuffs smiles into my face.

What buffalo.

You mean you haven't seen the buffalo yet we took them



down this morning they loved it they got a whole herd down there got some good shots too. Color.

I haven't seen them.

What about the cave you seen the cave yet jeez you don't want to miss the cave that's the best part we took them over

there yesterday. They went crazy.

Did they.

Oh jeez. You been to Rushmore they went wild at Rushmore. I thought they were gonna get arrested a little overexcited you know but they loved it all right.

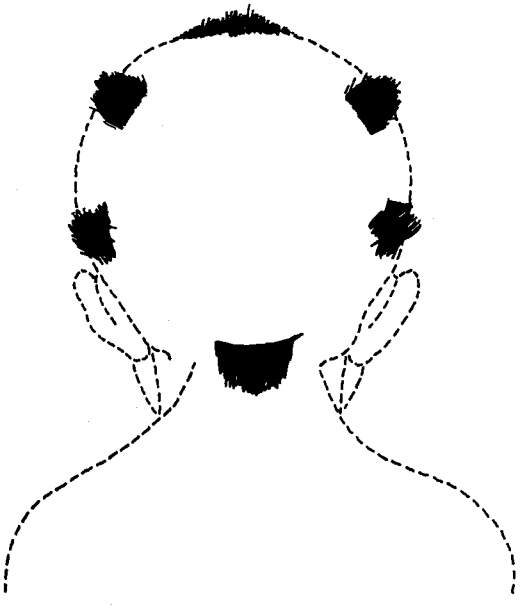
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Good.

Yeah they loved it all right they sure got a lot of stuff here don't they this is more like it. Like I was saying to my wife. We were going to spend it all in Yellowstone but they were going crazy. Geysers you know. Big deal. You seen one geyser know what I mean I mean all right water squirting out of the ground but they got entirely too many geysers there if you ask me. This is more like it. We went over to the Tetons. More mountains. Big deal that wasn't more like it but this is what I call more like it boy that was the smartest thing I ever did in my life coming over here. Smartest thing I ever did in my life. Especially what with the camper you can't beat this place for camping boy that camper. That was the smartest thing I ever did in my life too come on over I'll show you around we go over to his camper it's gigantic about the size of a Greyhound bus.

Smartest thing I ever did he says this is my wife Veronica. My name's Henry Aldrich. Hi there.

I'm Nick it's all going away. Unreal. We board the Queen Mary that's what we call her hah-hah-hah this is the rumpus room picture windows on both sides leather armchair card table foldup ping pong table this is where we store the bicycles here's the bar that's the galley the bridge is up ahead captain's quarters two TVs here one in the crew's quarters aft are you a veteran.



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No.

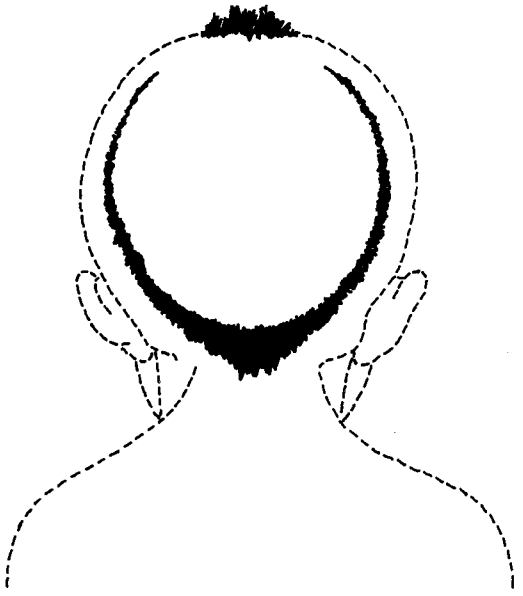
I thought you might be a veteran I was a Seabee jeez those were the days weren't they scotch.

No thanks he pours himself a scotch Henry you had enough today says Veronica ah come on willya a rifle pokes its way out of the crew's quarters a real rifle bah bah bah bah I gotcha I gotcha lousy gook.

Ah there they are says Henry I tollya not to play with the rifle it might be loaded.

A fat kid and a skinny kid run into the rumpus room the fat kid has the rifle the skinny kid has a helmet and bazooka not real we just killed a thousand gooks says the fat kid.

Nice Buster why don't you go back and kill some nice Indians look out they're coming over the rise.



We killed all the Injuns we're gonna kill him.

Put that rifle down damn it.

Hands up all of you says Buster.

Listen you fat little bastard I had enough out of you today.

He's not fat he's glandular says Veronica.

I'll murder him.

Henry.

I'm just saying that's all.

Look out it's loaded says the skinny kid Buster pulls the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trigger. Click nothing happens Henry grabs the gun slams the kid in the stomach with his fist. With his fist. Buster caroms off the foldup ping pong table onto the floor Henry gets down straddles him smacks his face smacks again from the other side with the back of his hand again again. Fat.

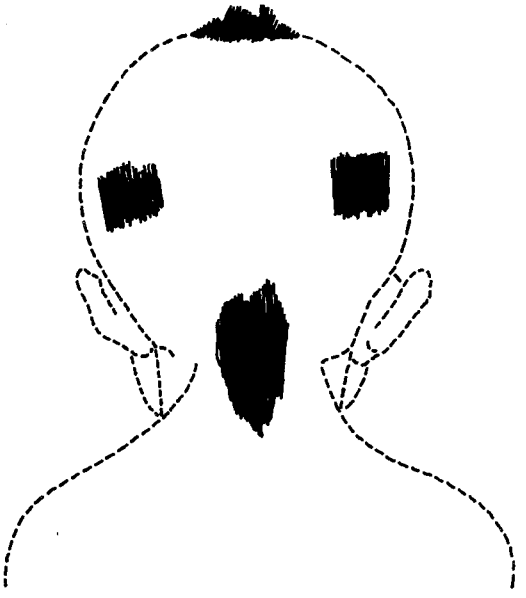
Little. Damn. Bastard. Veronica screaming pulls him off. Buster staggers sobbing back to the crew's quarters.

How do you like the Black Hills I say.

It's very nice says Veronica. It's something a little different.

They love it says Henry panting. It's something just a little bit different.

Well excuse me I have to go now don't you want to watch the game says Henry I stagger down the gangplank back to the tent sit down pick up my stone hold it tight in both hands look around gone. It's all gone. Everything unreal I feel like cardboard. I'm cold this place is dull nothing to do. I'm terribly bored when is Empty Fox getting back what a drag. A movie Indian are you kidding what kind of bullshit I'm freezing my ass off what am I doing here. This is awful. I'm lonely I need a drink. I'm just about to go watch the game when Empty Fox appears on a rock nearby. How-kola Ron he sweeps his arm toward the horizon the sun is going he says. I look around at the long rock shadows the sky is a darker blue the sun on the

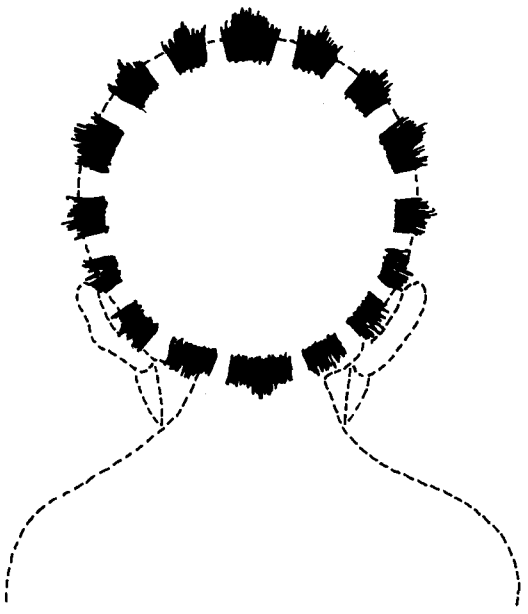


PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

peaks softer more orange Empty Fox drops an armload of firewood something is missing. The wind I realize the wind has been still a long time without my noticing the air quiet chill lying over the lake like a second more transparent lake everything looks three dimensional again.

How was Harney Peak. Empty Fox laughs.
Good he says.
What did you do.
I was on the wing.
What.

Dreaming that's what I call on the wing I go very fast. I had a great dream very strong.
What about
I make up a song. Goes like this
It doesn't matter



Where you start
It all comes together
It all falls apart.

Empty Fox I have something to say don't take it wrong I love you he grabs my shoulder and shakes me.

Hah. You're alive now anyway. Good. The only good Wasichu is a live Wasichu he laughs we make fire. We make a fire. The sun goes down I take out my candy bar.
Empty Fox would you like to smoke with me.
Sure what we smoke a candy bar hah hah hah.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This is where I keep my dope in here.

Better stay away from police who like candy what dope.

Hash.

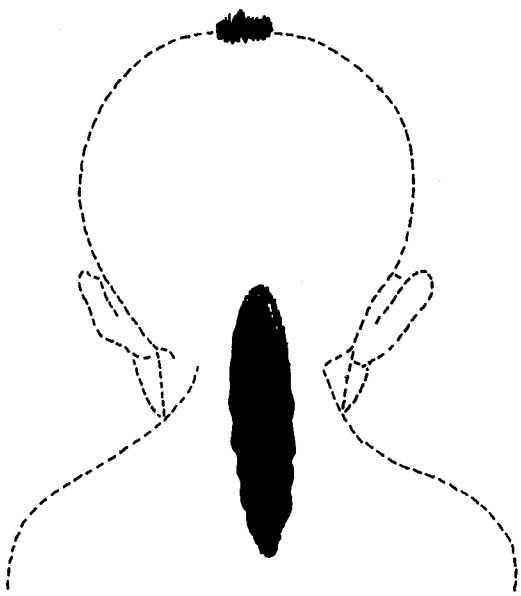
Hash good we smoke. I get it ready he takes out a small pipe of blood red clay.

Use my pipe he says. It's special.

We pass the pipe back and forth after a while Empty Fox says now you are my friend Ron you are connected to me I am connected to you both of us connected to this place he smokes a while more the rest is postcards he says.

Soon I'm on the wing I'm in the ocean sky sunny whales are spouting their heads break water they slide slowly to the surface spout their long backs glide roll under with a slow sweep of the flukes one especially surfacing next to me a great dappled grey whale very old his immense back

mossy and barnacled I can see the bristly folds of his blow hole a navel that connects him with his mother the air his flukes as he sounds waving high over me like a gesture goodbye follow me I'm choking Empty Fox has his hand on the back of my neck holding me down on the ground



what are you doing I throw him off sit up.

You're on the wing he says he dives at me I roll to the side get up he catches me with a punch on the shoulder cut it out I don't want to hurt you I know karate I say.

What kup.

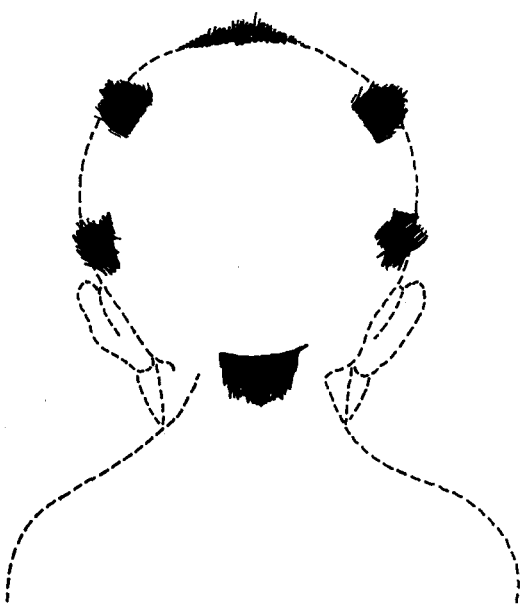
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Green belt.

Too bad I'm a brown belt UTZ he lets go with a left side kick I step back catch him on the achilles tendon with a lower block that sends him spinning completely around he comes out of it in a fast pivot with a right mace hand

that just misses my temple he dodges a right round house kick to his mid-section he comes in with a left knife hand that I catch with a double arm block he trips me as I go into a front kick I stumble he drives in with an upper target punch I barely deflect with an elbow block a head

kick that comes out of nowhere grazes my ear my attempt to counter stopped by a fancy backward side kick I manage to back away gasping for breath he's not even breathing hard I know one blow is enough to finish either of us he comes in very loose hard to see his movements in the



firelight he feints a side kick comes in with a spear hand attack to my midsection just short feints a left knife hand UTZ catches me with an elbow to the ribs that almost knocks me down but I come back with a reverse punch YATZ that catches him on the chest we both get off side kicks

UTZ UTZ collide stumble back we circle one another me gasping limping from the collision my ribs hurt I know I can't last long I charge screaming feint a kick throw an upper target punch he bangs aside with a left arm block a left middle target he catches with a knife hand block that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

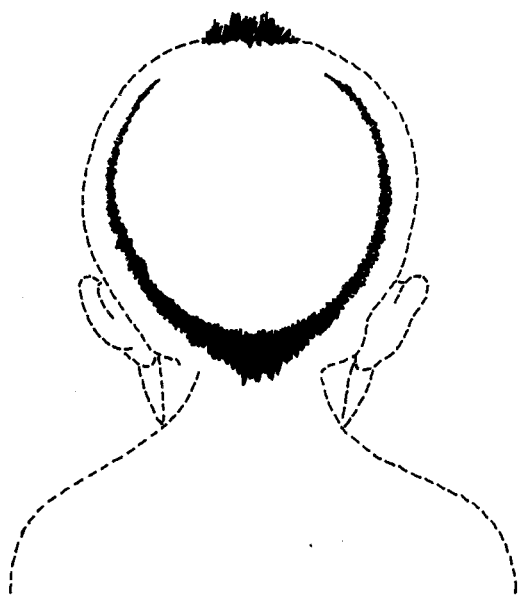
almost breaks my wrist and lands a reverse punch to my eye UTZ just as I bring my knee up into his groin I lose my balance go sprawling onto the ground he doubles over staggers away I can't get up next thing I know he's on the back of my neck again holding me down you're on the

wing he says. He tightens his hands shakes me by the neck till my teeth chatter if you fly too far you can't come back he says he shakes me talk shakes me again talk talk canke ot'ungyakel akiuzapi no mini oihpeyapi.

Good go on what else.

Yunkan miniwanca kin iehcegla ablak hingle jonas mini oihpeyapi kin icunhan wakantanka hogan tanka wan el yeya canke jonas niyakel napca canke nige kin mahel anpetu yamni na hanhepi yamni t'e sni un na okiwanjila wakantanka cekiyahe next thing he knows his face is wet

it's morning everything is white he's in a sleeping bag covered with snow. Alone. He feels a lump in his side he unzips the bag it's his stone he gets up his neck is sore his ribs ache thigh stiff wrist purple eye swollen it feels good his body feels serious full of its own intelligence his head

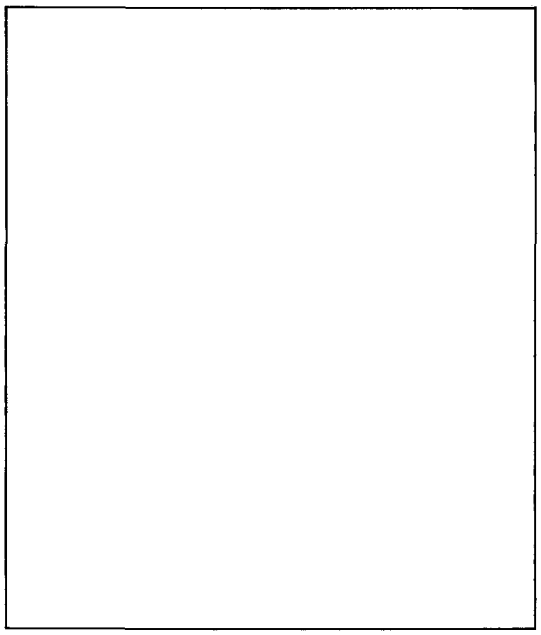


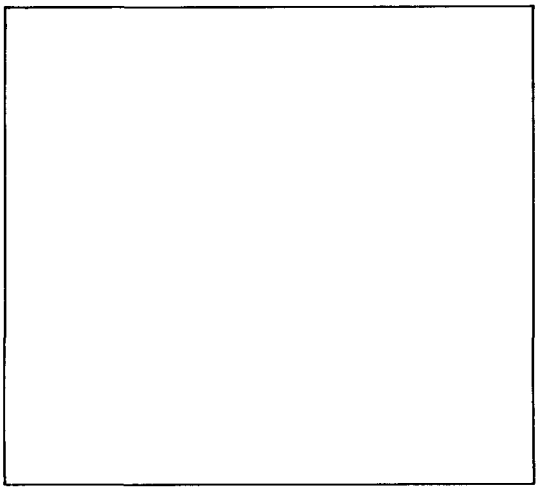
is peculiarly empty light he takes out his notebook. He writes

everything looks more real
" " feels " "
I " " "

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then he throws away his notebook. Walks out to the road starts hitching into Custer he gets a ride right away in Custer he puts his hand in his pocket finds Empty Fox has left him his rings he puts them on he still wears them today. □





The drawings on pp. 29-47 are after F. LaFlesche, "The Osage Tribe. Child Naming Rite," 43rd Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology (1925-6), Washington, D.C., 1928, and show boys' haircuts—based on animals—of various clans.

Jerome Klinkowitz

A PERSUASIVE ACCOUNT: WORKING IT OUT WITH RONALD SUKENICK

Halfway from the Lower East Side of New York to Laguna Beach, California, the protagonist of Ronald Sukenick's *Out* meets a Sioux medicine man, Empty Fox. "I want to write a book like a cloud that changes as it goes," he tells the Indian when asked his ambition. "I want to erase all the books," Empty Fox replies. "My ambition is to unlearn everything I can't read or write that's a start. I want to unlearn and unlearn till I get to the place where the ocean of the unknown begins where my fathers live. Then I want to go back and bring my people to live beside that ocean where they can be whole again as they were before the Wasichus came." *Wasicun*—"fat takers"—are what the Sioux call white men, despoilers of the continent and disgusting examples of the wrong way to live. The Indian people see the land as a community to which they belong rather than as a commodity to exploit, and are ideals of ecological balance who will neither exhaust the earth nor overload themselves to the point of death. But Empty Fox does more than show a white man how to live; he points a way of life for something else that's dying—fiction—and provides Sukenick with a model for sustaining his novel, which is what the book is all about.

Since 1968, when John Barth declared that literature was "exhausted" and Leslie Fiedler, Susan Sontag, Norman Mailer, and other critics cheered along that the novel at least was dead, Ronald Sukenick has been proving that there is a great deal of life to be rediscovered in the form. His first novel, *Up* (Dial Press, 1968, now a Delta/Dell paperback), followed Barth with a generous indulgence in aesthetic allegory, but instead of painting itself into a corner or disappearing up its own fundament, *Up* pointed a way out. Is the real world too ponderous and depressingly dull to capture in interesting fiction? Is it indeed a problem for art? " 'Sure,' " agrees Sukenick's aesthetic-allegorist character, who's involved with living the novel, writing it, and teaching literature at the same time. " 'That's what Wordsworth is talking about. He tells how as a kid he had to grab hold of a wall to make sure the world was really there, but when he grew up the dead weight of reality almost crushed the sense of his own existence. It's when the world seems oppressive, dead, or to put it another way, unreal, that I get the feeling I'm walking around like a zombie.' " To be of help, art must not describe but create reality, seeking " 'a vital connection with the world that, to stay alive, must be constantly reinvented to cor-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

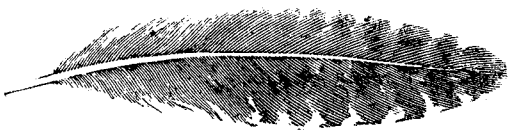
respond with our own truest feelings.' " "When, through the imagination, the ego manages to reconcile reality with its own needs," the actual Ronald Sukenick once wrote in a book about Wallace Stevens, "the formerly insipid landscape is infused with the ego's emotion, and reality, since it now seems intensely relevant to the ego, suddenly seems more real." Insipid reality has been the downfall of many novelists of Barth's generation, who abandoned it entirely for self-indulgent aestheticism. But Sukenick applies to the novel what he sensed about art in general, and revitalizes fiction by having it do what it should: to make reality seem less unreal.

Out moves from the clutter and hassle of the East to the pure space of an empty California beach, leaving behind much of Sukenick's Brooklyn-Greenwich Village-Lower East Side material, and also his forms which served as parodies of themselves and were—for the '60s—the style of the time. "It's easier and sociabler to talk technique than it is to make art," Barth admitted in his "Literature of Exhaustion" essay, but as a form—*Lost in the Funhouse* in fiction, Warhol's soup cans in painting—the result was an apparent dead end. "In the late 60's innovation in general was good, now innovation in general is bad," Sukenick complained recently in *The Village Voice*. "The Pop movement, though it had its moments, was a disaster for the arts. It introduced a confusion of criteria that has yet to be straightened out. Meantime Poppers and Nonpoppers alike pay for their exploitation of the artmart in the name of avant-garde." Or as Gilbert Sorrentino explains in his novel *Imaginative Qualities of Actual Things*, in a passage Sukenick is fond of quoting:

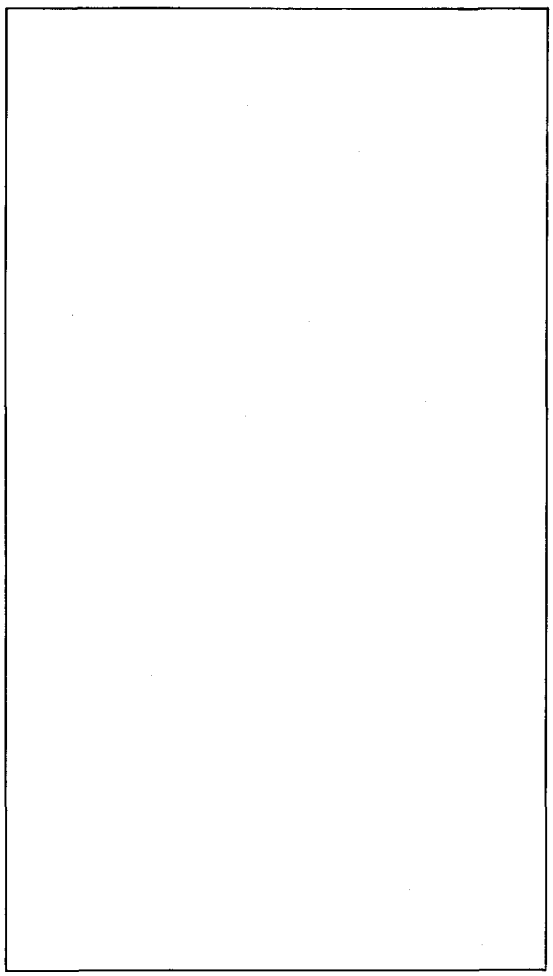
> *Art is the undoing of many a hick. I think of those twangy painters slaughtered in the floods of coin the pop art machine produced. Only people like the Pope can engage pop art and survive. I remember having lunch with one of these painters once, in McSorley's. Something about painting the pickle on my plate, my ale, etc. My face was stiff with my polite smile. I can hear that flat Nebraska speech right now. Or take the New York School. Joy of decadence. Wait till the folks in Terre Haute see this! How to put it? That New York becomes a chocolate bunny, and that they print their work, in teams. You see them together, nice young men and women, looking at that bunny. They are amusing, glib articulators of arrested development. Their noses are pointed toward the Iowa Writers' Workshop, or some other Workshop, some Seminar on Contemporary Poetry. Safe in hamburger heaven. Back home again in Indiana.*

A few years before, Sukenick had reported the similar destruction of a geographical avant-garde, the Lower East Side of New York, which as "The East Village" did as much harm as Pop and despoiled a necessary haven, making the survival of serious American art all the less likely. His essay "Live & Let Alone on the Lower East Side" ran in *The Village Voice* the week of Robert Kennedy's assassination, and was typographically framed by memoria to the slain candidate.

Yet Sukenick is no writer of obituaries for a dead tradition, nor is he a New York snob resenting the Midwestern tourists invading (and taking over) his home. His art moves West, toward a California emptiness, which he sees as anything but derogatory since it is first established in Empty Fox's South Dakota—a tremendous, surging sensation of freedom, of liberation from space, even from sound, so that a resolution seems for once possible. There's always the danger of an ersatz California clutter, which can happen even in the Black Hills. "The Wasichus make Disneyland of all this so they can sell it," accuses Empty Fox; "they get the Indians to pretend they're



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Indians they make believe these beautiful mountains are beautiful they pretend magic is magic they make believe the truth is the truth otherwise they can't believe anything. There is a place with a billboard of a mountain in front of the mountain you Wasichus can't see anything without pretending to see anyway you don't believe it." For Sukenick imagination is an essential faculty of the perception, but through "Disneyland" it becomes a cheap version of the willing suspension of disbelief. "Is Disneyland really necessary?" he asks in his contribution to Raymond Federman's book, *Surfiction.* "It's as if we have to make believe before we can work up the confidence to believe, as if belief in good conscience were the privilege of primitives or maybe Europeans."

What the "primitives" have is a better hold on reality, not just because they are "in closer touch" but because of their ability to sense the totality of what's going on in the world. "We Sioux are not a simple people," writes the old medicine man Lame Deer in his book *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions.* "We are very complicated. We are forever looking at things from different angles." Empty Fox is a man in Lame Deer's tradition, and so is Juan Matus, through whom Carlos Castaneda learned ways of approaching the world Sukenick was at the same time finding appropriate for fiction. "For a sorcerer, reality, or the world we all know, is only a description," and in *Journey to Ixtlan* Castaneda tells of Don Juan's "efforts into leading me to a genuine conviction that what I held in mind as the world at hand was merely a description of the world: a description that had been pounded into me from the moment I was born." Castaneda's "mistakes" sound strikingly similar to the failures of modern fictionists to keep up with their world, too. " 'Your problem,' " says Don Juan in *A Separate Reality*, "is that you confuse the world with what people do . . . . The things people do are shields against the forces that surround us; what we do as people gives us comfort and makes us feel safe; what people do is rightfully very important, but only as a shield. We never learn that the things we do as people are only shields and we let them dominate and topple our lives"—and also our fiction.

Ronald Sukenick would revalidate our imaginations so that we can look at our environment in a real way. For Don Juan, it's a question of two distinct manners of perceiving. " 'Looking' referred to the ordinary way in which we are accustomed to perceive the world, while 'seeing' entailed a very complex process by virtue of which a man of knowledge allegedly perceives the 'essence' of the things of the world." For fiction, it is the ability to transcend a mere describing of life (always a danger in this most mimetic of forms) to a revelation of the truth of experience, which may be at odds with the popular consensus. To stop the world—to call a halt to having one's personal, provisional view of things as absolute—may be a key to the cultural turnabout so apparent around us, reflected in Sukenick's new style of fiction, Castaneda's great popularity, and the appeal environmentalist Aldo Leopold has for such a broad intellectual audience as biologist Paul Shepard (responding in this issue of *NAR*) and philosopher of ethics John J. McMahon, commenting in *The New Republic:* "Leopold has learned that to absolutize our narrow wavelength of perception is sheer arrogance," and a sure way to extinction.

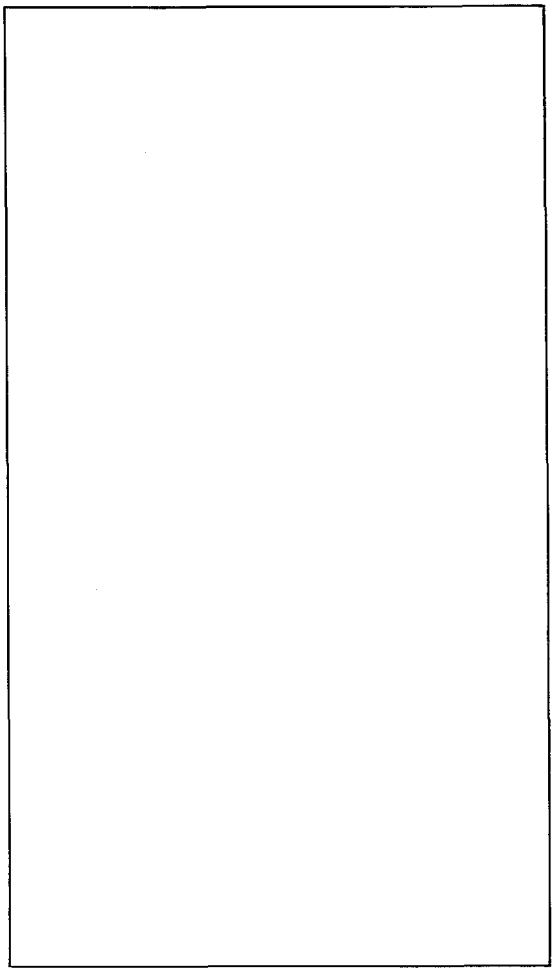
To arrive at "seeing," Castaneda learned in *Ixtlan*, one must stop the world. " 'Stopping the world' was indeed an appropriate rendition of certain states of awareness in which the reality of everyday life is altered because the flow of interpretation, which ordinarily runs uninterruptedly, has been stopped by a set of circumstances alien to that flow.' " Don Juan's task, as exercised in

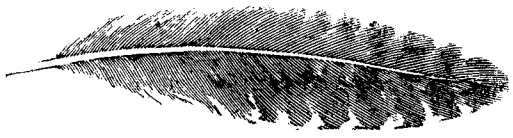
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Separate Reality, "was to disarrange a particular certainty which I shared with everyone else, the certainty that our 'common-sense' views of the world are final." The imagination, Sukenick has said, makes reality seem more real—and Don Juan's methods are a paradigm for liberating oneself from the obstructed, unimaginative view. " 'The little smoke removes the body and one is free, like the wind.' " and the metaphor of bodily flight becomes "the sorcerer's capacity to move through nonordinary reality and then to return at will to ordinary reality." The fullest possibilities of vision—not just the documentary records of what historically occurred—are what Sukenick wants for his fiction, and Don Juan is the master who can show how " 'There are worlds upon worlds, right here in front of us.' " As Walter Goldschmidt wrote in the foreword to the first Castaneda volume, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, "By experiencing other worlds . . . we see our own for what it is and are thereby enabled also to see fleetingly what the real world, the one between our own cultural construct and those other worlds, must in fact be like."

Although such wonderful revelations of the world are the goal of art, and certainly proper business for the novel, the vitality of Sukenick's theories have made them controversial. Tom Wolfe, who asked "Why aren't they writing the Great American Novel anymore?" and answered "because the new journalists were doing it better," granted Sukenick "a curious ground in between, part fiction and part nonfiction," but other critics—notably Pearl K. Bell in *Dissent*—have cast him among "such celebrants of unreason, chaos, and inexorable decay as Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., John Barth, Rudolph Wurlitzer, Donald Barthelme, and a horde of mini-Jeremiahs crying havoc in the Western world." The real issue, as Nathan Scott lets slip in his latest essay on contemporary fiction, is that the "inward liberation" of the imagination "offers us an effective release from the bullying of all the vexations of history"—and, incidentally, that this aesthetic has been so demonstrably adopted "by the hordes of those young long-haired, jean-clad, pot-smoking bohemians who have entered the world of psychedelia." But Sukenick has critically covered himself since 1967, in his *Wallace Stevens: Musing the Obscure*. "The mind orders reality not by imposing ideas on it but by discovering significant relations within it," and even freaky old Don Juan agrees that " 'Things don't change. You change your way of looking, that's all.' " If the teachings of Don Juan offer one cumulative lesson it is that the "other realities" bear just as much objective weight as the provisional realities we live day to day, and that the only responsible way out is "in." "Our particular moment and place is located in our heads and our bodies," Sukenick wrote for the *Partisan Review* symposium on The New Cultural Conservativism, "and at the risk of solipsism we must start there and push outward." Or as he told interviewer Joe David Bellamy in the *Chicago Review*, "I don't want to present people with illusions, and I don't want to let them off cheaply by releasing their fantasies in an easy way. If the stuff has done that, okay. It's probably inevitable in any case, but it's not really the kind of thing I'm trying to do . . . . Because what that does is allow people to escape, obviously, from reality, and I want to bang them with it." Or, as he's said in casual conversation, part of the Disneyland rap, "the less we use our imagination the more somebody else is going to use it for us—by manipulating us."

Fiction plays its tricks, but in his own *Village Voice* essay on Castaneda's work Sukenick insists that "All art deconditions us so that we may respond more fully to experience." The wealth of that response has been his aim since *Up*, through the efforts to capture the





PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

truth of experience in *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories* (Dial Press, 1969, now available from Serendipity Books, 1790 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, CA 94709), and most recently *Out*. While others would let fiction die, Sukenick argues that its great advantage "over history, journalism, or any other supposedly 'factual' kind of writing is that it is an expressive medium. It transmits feeling, energy, excitement. Television can give us the news, fiction can best express our response to the news . . . . No other medium, in other words, can so well keep track of the reality of our experience." Technically, his novel *Out* proves that a novel can be a concrete as well as an imaginative structure, and offers art for the eye and the page-turning hand as well as for the mind. But ultimately Sukenick's genius rests with his discovery that the reality we know is only a description, and that "The power of a sorcerer is the power of the feeling he can invest in his description so it is felt as a persuasive account of the world." This same persuasiveness is the measure of good fiction, which Ronald Sukenick brings to life, proving what an unexhausted novelist can do.

PAUL PETRIE

THE CANNIBALS

Autopsy of oranges—the soft
devouring of flesh.

Like grace-notes, trills, the birds
drop from the morning branches
and eat.
Small twigs knock on the eaves.

Beside my plate
my mother's letter lies,
filled with the dead and dying
and the small mouthfuls
of hospitals.

I feel them as I eat
dropping into the bruising dark like fruits,
all childhood's faces.

Outside, the wind
batters the small bird-feeder against the walls,
and bends the great-branched oaks until the wind
becomes the trees, the trees
the wind.

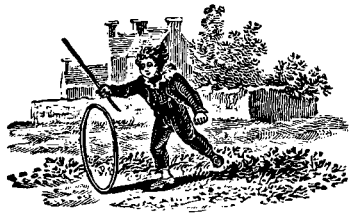
I snap on television.
Melina Mercouri's face
shines from the screen.
"My one great love—" she says,
and her goshawk eyes swell huge
with tears,
and through the walls of my face,
the walls of the room,
her life shines
like radium.

I am sitting by my window where the small birds feed
watching television, while the oranges spurt in my mouth,
and the wind outside is bending the oaks till the wind
is one with the trees and the trees with the wind,
and everything in the world is passing slowly
into each other's bodies
in joy or pain.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ARNE NAESS:

The Place of Joy...



The solution of environmental problems is presupposed in all utopias. "In a communist society," Marx says in a famous passage, "nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can be accomplished in any branch he wishes. Society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow: to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, tend cattle in the evening, engage in literary criticism after dinner, just as I have in mind, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic."

Note that three of the four examples of what we shall do under ideal conditions presuppose a wonderful solution of the main environmental problems. Let us, as an illustration, suppose a certain percent of the population of London—say five million people—one Thursday morning joyfully declare "Let us go hunting before lunch!" It is not difficult to see that the hundred years since Marx have not mainly been used to get nearer to the realization of his admirable communist society.

The complete individual is not a specialist; he is a generalist and an amateur. This does not mean that he has no special interests, that he never works hard, that he does not partake in the life of the community. But he does so from personal inclination, with joy, and within the framework of his value priorities.

Marx does not mean that professionals and specialists need be exterminated, I suppose. They need, however, today to be under suspicion. In highly industrialized, urbanized, and centralized societies, it pays to be professional and specialist, and it costs to be generalist and amateur. That is, high social status and manifest so-called *success* is assured if one develops to an extreme degree one's specialized know-how. This holds whether your boss is Nixon, Brezhnev, or Mao. In the future ideal society, whether outlined by Marx or by more bourgeois prophets, there will be people who might use most of their energy doing highly specialized, difficult things, but as amateurs—that is, from inclination and from a mature philosophy of life. There will be no fragmentary men. And certainly no fragmentary ecologists.

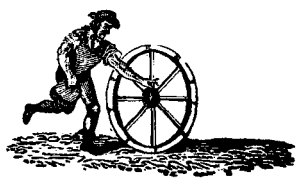
Let me elaborate this latter point, for there tends to be a contradiction between the lives and the teachings of fighters for a better environment. Since the main avenue of influence in matters of life style is that of example, not of preaching, my conclusion is that pollution problems would not have reached such tremendous proportions if those who experience intensive joy from the environment had made that joy manifest in their own lives. This implies sometimes saying "no, thank you" to high-salaried positions, sometimes being fired rather than comply with orders from superiors. It implies disappearances from offices and urban areas for longer periods than conventionally accepted.

We all, I suppose, admire the pioneers who—through endless meetings held in contaminated city air—succeeded in establishing wilderness areas in the USA. But their constant work in offices and corridors largely ruined their capacity to enjoy the areas. They lost their capacity to show, *in action*, what they cared for; otherwise they would much more often *live* in the wilderness. Many people verbally admire wilderness areas, but they have not given up their jobs or stepped down from their exalted positions as chairman of this or that, as senior member of a law firm, as professor of wilderness, in order to enjoy the areas at least part of the year. If they had done that, thousands might have followed them, and not only a faint trickle.

What I say here about advocates of wilderness seems unhappily to be valid for advocates of a better environment in general. Ordinary people show a good deal of skepticism toward verbally expressed valuations which do not color the life style of the propagandist. The environmentalist sometimes succumbs to a joyless life that belies his concern for better environment. The cult of dissatisfaction is apt to add to the already fairly advanced joylessness we find among socially responsible, successful people, and to undermine one of the chief presuppositions of the ecological movement: that joy is related to environment and nature.

In short, the best way to promote a good cause is to give a good example. It is not the only way, but it must not be neglected. One ought not be afraid that the example will go unnoticed. Albert Schweitzer hid himself in Africa, but

...in a World of Fact



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his public relations prospered and so did the sale of his books.

So much for utopias. They all presuppose either the nonexistence of environmental problems, or their solution. My next concern is with how to get nearer to our utopias. I shall take up only one aspect: the relation between personal life style and teaching.

The life style of environmentalists

Joy is contagious. But if we only talk about the joys of good environment, it is of little avail.

I know that many *have* turned their backs on more lucrative careers and on a life of security cultivating well-established sciences. But this is not enough. Life should manifest the peaks of our value priorities. The work for better environment is after all only of instrumental value—that is, it does not manifest what we consider non-instrumental, intrinsic values. We remain on the level of techniques. What criterion shall we use to follow the lead of personal priorities? We do have one that is underrated among conscientious, responsible people: joy.

Joy according to "pessimist" philosophers

Suppose somebody openly adhered to the doctrine that there cannot under any circumstances—funereal or not—be too much cheerfulness. The sad truth is, I think, that he or she would be classified as shallow, cynical, disrespectful, irreligious, mocking.

Søren Kierkegaard is an important figure here. He *seems* to take anguish, desperation, sense of guilt, suffering as the necessary, and sometimes even sufficient condition of authentic living. But he also insists upon continuous joy as a condition. Whatever is done without joy is of no avail. "At 70,000 fathoms depth" you should be glad. You should be able to enjoy going to the circus or the botanical gardens with the children on Sundays. At 70,000 fathoms one should retain "a joyful mind." He sometimes calls himself *Hilarius*, the one permeated with *hilaritas*, the Latin word for cheerfulness.

"Dread" is the technical existentialist word for the kind of anxiety which opens the way to a deeper understanding of life. But according to Heidegger, another hero of modern pessimism, dread is not an isolated sensation of negative color. It is a complex state of the mind in which dread cannot exist without joy; that is, one who thinks he has the dread experience all right, but lacks joy, suffers from an illusion. Dread has an internal relation to joy.

Our problem is not that we are disintegrated—that is, immature and therefore joyless—but that we glorify immaturity. Do the most influential philosophers of our time and culture represent peaks of maturity or integration? I have not only Heidegger, Sartre, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, but also Marx and Nietzsche in mind. Tentatively, I must answer *No*. There are lesser known, but perhaps more mature ones, like Jaspers, Whitehead.

Should the world's misery, should the approaching eco-catastrophe, make one sad? It seems that as long as the world's population is more than a million, there must at any time of the day and night be at least one human being in utter despair or excruciating pain. And I suppose one might add, if it's important at all, that at least one would be suffering extreme agony that is undeserved. With present day technical know-how, I am afraid we must add that each of us who eats at least once a day with (shameful?) appetite, could easily do a little more to relieve such extreme sufferings. For many of us, this is a source of uneasiness or even of guilt.

It is my point that, nevertheless, there is no good reason we *should feel sad* about all this. According to the philosophies I am defending, such regret is a sign of immaturity: the immaturity of unconquered passiveness, of disintegration.

The remedy, the psychotherapy against sadness caused by the world's misery, is to do something about it. I shall refrain from mentioning Florence Nightingale, but let me note that Gandhi loved to care for, wash, massage, etc., lepers; he simply enjoyed it. It is very common to find those who have to do with extreme misery more than usually cheerful. According to Spinoza, the power of an individual is infinitely small compared to that of the universe, so we must not expect to save the world at large. The main point—and it is built into the basic conceptual framework of Spinoza's philosophy—is that of activeness. By interaction with extreme miseries, cheerfulness is gained. And the interaction need not be a direct one. Most of us can do more in indirect ways, using our privileged positions in rich societies.

There are clear reasons for us not to concentrate all our efforts on the extreme miseries, but to attack causes, conditions, factors indirectly contributing to misery and, just as important, to encourage factors directly causing or facilitating the emergence of active, and therefore cheerful work to alleviate misery.

Behind the prevalent passivity there is a lot of despair, a lot of pessimism about our own capacity to have a good time, to enjoy ourselves—*except* during vacations—in a private world of thoughtlessness, well isolated from the great issues.

One of the strangest, one of the next-to-paradoxical theses of Spinoza—and of Thomas Aquinas and many others—is that the knowledge of evil, or of misery, is inadequate knowledge. In short, there is *no* such object, whereas there *is* something good to know. Evil is always an *absence* of something, a lack of something positive. And their theory of knowledge is such that objects of knowledge are always something. Just as when you say that you *see* that the glass is transparent, what you see is, for instance, a red rose *behind* the glass. You do not see the transparency, which is no object of perception.

In any event, I do not think that the positive non-existence of evil things can be shown without a great deal of redefining of words—but I do not consider the view totally ridiculous. Like so many other strange points in major philosophies, it has an appeal, it points in the right direction without perhaps stating anything clearly in the "scientific" sense.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Spinoza on Joy

Spinoza operates with three main concepts of joy and three of sorrow: *Laetitia*, *hilaritas*, *titillatio* are the three Latin terms for the positive emotions. Translations are to a surprising degree arbitrary, because their function in Spinoza's system is only discovered from studying the complex total structure of his system. The isolation of one concept from the others is not possible. The system is more than the sum of its parts. You must, from a strict, professional point of view, take it or leave it, *as a whole.*

Laetitia I translate as "joy," a generic term comprising several important sub-kinds of joy. The main classification of joy is into *hilaritas*, "cheerfulness," and *titillatio*, "pleasurable excitement." *Hilaritas* is the serene thing, coloring the whole personality—or, better, the whole world.

Hilaritas, cheerfulness, is defined by Spinoza as a joy to which every part of the body contributes. It does not affect only a subgroup of functions of the organism, but every one, and therefore the totality. There cannot be too much of *hilaritas*, Spinoza contends.

The other main kind of joy, *titillatio*, affects a subgroup of the parts of the body. If very narrowly based and strong, it dominates and thereby inhibits other joy. There can accordingly be too much of it. Spinoza mentions love of money, sexual infatuation, ambition, and he mentions other sources of joy, which are all good if in moderate portions that do not hamper and inhibit one another.

A second classification of joy is that derived from contemplation of our own achievement, creativity, or—more broadly—activeness, and joy derived from contemplation of causes of joy outside us. The first he calls satisfaction or repose in ourselves, *acquiescentia in se ipso*, the other *amor*. There can be too much of them, however, because they sometimes refer to parts, not to the whole.

What refers to the whole of the body, incidentally, refers also to the whole of the conscious mind, according to Spinoza, and to the whole of the universe—or, more generally, to the whole of Nature as far as we know it. This is understandable from Spinoza's so-called "philosophy of identity" which proclaims the ultimate identity of thought and matter, and from his theory of knowledge, which relates all our knowledge of the world to interaction with the body—just as biologists tend to do today.

Lack of self acceptance, *acquiescentia in se ipso*, accounts for much of the passivity in environmental conflicts shown by an important sector of the public. Many are on the right side, but few stand up, clearly and emphatically telling how they feel about the pollution in their neighborhoods. They do not tell in public meetings how they, as private persons, feel about it. They do not have sufficient self-respect, respect for their own feelings, faith in their own importance, to stand up. They think they are "nobodies." What we ask is *not* that they should fight for the change to the better, but just that they should tell about it in public, make it crystal clear. A small minority will then fight—with joy—supported by that considerable section.

The distinction between pervasive joy, covering all, and partial joy, need not be considered an absolute dichotomy, but can be graded. Joy may be more or less pervasive. Clearly, the higher degrees of joy require high degrees of integration of the personality, and high degrees of such integration require intense cultivation of the personal aspect of interaction with the environment. It requires a firm grasp of what we call value priorities, but which Spinoza rather would call reality priorities, because of his resolute location of value among "objective" realities. Spinoza distinguishes degrees of realness and perfection. The perfected is the complete. Integration of personality presupposes that we never act as functionaries or as mere specialists, but always as whole personalities conscious of our value priorities and of the need to make manifest those priorities in social, direct action.

The specific thing to be learned from Spinoza and certain modern psychologists is, however, to integrate in the world the value priorities themselves. We would tend to say "the world of facts," but the cleavage of value from facts is mainly due to an over-estimation of certain scientific traditions from Galileo, confusing the *instrumental* excellence of the mechanistic world view with its properties as a whole philosophy. Spinoza was heavily influenced by mechanical models of matter, but did not extend it to cover "reality." His reality was not mechanical, not value-neutral or value-vacuous.

The cleavage into two worlds, the world of fact and the world of values, can theoretically be overcome by placing, as Spinoza does, the joys and other so-called "subjective" phenomena into the unified total field of realities. But this is too much to go into here. I am more concerned with the place of joys among the total *experiences*. The objectivist conception of value is important, however, in any discussion in which technocrats tend to dismiss cheerfulness of environment as something "merely subjective."

Spinoza makes use of the following short, crisp, and paradoxical definition of joy (*laetitia*): "Joy is man's transition from greater to lesser perfection." Somewhat less categorically he sometimes says that joy is the affect by which or through which we make the transition to greater perfection. Instead of "perfection" we may say "integrity" or "wholeness."

I consider of central importance the difference between these formulations and the subjectivistic ones proclaiming that joy only *follows* or *accompanies* transitions. The relation between joy and increase of perfection is, according to Spinoza, an *intrinsic* one, not extrinsic or external. That is, the two cannot be separated in practice, only conceptually. Such a realistic view of joy suggests that joyfulness, like color, attaches and forms part of objects, but of course changes with the medium, and must be defined in terms of interaction with organisms. Joy is linked intrinsically to increase of perfection, and increase of perfection is linked to a dozen other increases: increase in power and virtue, increase in freedom and rationality, increase of activeness, increase in the degree to which we are causes of our own actions, increase in the degree to which our actions are understandable by reference to ourselves. Joy is thus part of the basic conceptual structure.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The increase in power is an increase in carrying out what we sincerely strive to do. Power does not presuppose that we coerce somebody else; a tyrant may be less powerful than some poor soul sitting in his prison. This concept has a long tradition and should not be forgotten. What we strive to do is defined in relation to actual happenings; thus, "to save the world from pollution" is not something anybody strives to do, but is some kind of limited effort to save the things around us.

Cheerfulness, *hilaritas*, requires action of the whole integrated personality and is linked to great increase in power. With the absence of joy there is no increase in power, freedom, or self-determination. Thus, lack of joy should be taken seriously, especially among so-called responsible people furthering a good cause. Joy of work, like any other partial joy, can dominate and subdue other sources of joy to such an extent that the over-all result is stagnation or even decrease in power. In the terminology of Spinoza this means a loss of perfection or integration and increased difficulty in reaching the state of *hilaritas*, cheerfulness.

"To be glad" seems to be equated with enjoying oneself, laughing, relaxing in the sense of being passive. Enjoying oneself by intoxication, which decreases the higher integrations of the nervous system, means resignation. It means giving up the possibility of joyfulness of the whole person. Cheerfulness in the Spinozan sense may not be expressed in laughter or smiling, but in concentration, present-ness, activeness.

The example of Buddha may illustrate my point. Buddha was an active person, but had more repose in himself, *acquiescentia in se ipso*. Long before he died he is said to have reached Nirvana, which, properly interpreted within Mahayana Buddhism, involves supreme integration and liberation of the personality, implying bliss or—in the terminology of Spinoza—*hilaritas*. The researches of Stcherbatsky and others concerning the term *duhkha*, conventionally translated as "pain," showed that the so-called "pessimistic" Buddhism also has a doctrine of joy as a central aspect of the reaching of freedom in Nirvana.

Loosely, one may say that what we are now lacking in our technological age is the repose in oneself. The conditions of life prevent the full development of that self-respect and self-esteem which is required in order to reach a stable high degree of *acquiescentia in se ipso*. (The term "alienation," incidentally, is related to the opposite of *in se*, namely *in alio;* we repose in something else, something outside, achievement in the eyes of others, "other-directedness.")

Humility as defined by Spinoza is sorrow from man's contemplation of his own impotency, his weakness and helplessness. A sorrow always involves decrease of perfection, virtue, freedom. We can get to know adequately more potent things than ourselves. This gives joy because of our activeness in the very process of knowing it. The realization of our own potency and the active relation to the more potent gives joy. Thus, instead of humility, which is a kind of sorrow, we have three joys: first, that due to contemplation of our own power, however small, which gives us *acquiescentia in se ipso*, self-respect and contentedness; second, the joy due to increasing personal, active knowledge of the greater object—for instance, the international pollution situation; and third, joy due to the (active) interaction which strictly speaking defines ourselves as well as objects or fragments of the total field—"Nature," in the terminology of Spinoza.

Adequate knowledge always has a joyful personal aspect because it reveals a power, never a weakness, in our personality. In the words of Spinoza himself: "Therefore, if man, when he contemplates himself, perceives some kind of impotency in himself, it does not come from his understanding himself, but from his power of action being reduced." "To the extent that man knows himself with true rationality, to that extent it is assumed that he understands his essence, that is, his power."

We say with some haughtiness that Spinoza belongs to the age of rationalism, to the pre-Freud, pre-Hitler era. But Spinoza in many ways anticipated Freud, and his term *ratio* must not be translated by our term "rational" or "rationality" without immediately adding that his *ratio* was of a supple kind and internally related to emotion. Rational action was to him action with absolutely maximal perspective—that is, things seen as fragments of total nature—not what we tend to call rational today. Spinoza was not an "intellectual" in the sense of Anglo-American social science.

Pity and commiseration (*commiseratio* and *misericordia*) are no virtues with Spinoza, and even less with Gandhi, but there are worse feelings and they may have positive instrumental value. Spinoza says: ". . . commiseration, like shame, although it is not a virtue, is nevertheless good in so far as it shows that a desire for living honestly is present in the man who is possessed with shame, just as pain is called good in so far as it shows that the injured part has not yet putrified." A modest function, but nevertheless of instrumental value! Tersely, Spinoza adds, ". . . a man who lives according to the dictates of reason strives as much as possible to prevent himself from being touched by commiseration."

The world's cripples are among those who practically unanimously agree.

Commiseration is sorrow, and therefore is in itself an evil. According to a certain conventional morality, a duty should be carried out even if there is no joy. This suggests that we had better disregard our duties if we are not permeated with joy. This seems to me to be somewhat fanatical, except when one adds a kind of norm concerning the high priority of development of the *capacity* of joy. "Alas! I cannot do my duty today because it does not fill me with joy. Better to escalate my efforts to experience joy!" Spinoza does not stress the remedy—integration—but he presupposes it. The case of humility shows how *ratio* changes sorrows to joys: Spinozistic psychoanalysis tries to loosen up the mental cramps causing unnecessary pain.

Freud worked with a tripartition, the Id, the Ego, and the Superego. The Superego, through its main application in explanation of neuroses, has got a rather ugly reputation: it coerces the poor individual to try the impossible and lets it then experience shame and humility when there is no success. In Spinoza's analysis, the *ratio* also functions as a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kind of overseer, but its main function is rather one of consolation. It fixes the attention upon what we *can* do rather than upon what we cannot, and eliminates feelings of necessary separation from others; it stresses the harmony of rational wills, and of well understood self-interests.

A major virtue of a system like Spinoza's is the extreme consistency and tenacity with which consequences, even the most paradoxical, are drawn from intuitively reasonable principles. It meets the requirements of clarity and logic of modern natural science. The system says to us: "You do not like consequence No. 101? But you admit it follows from a premise you have admitted. Then give up the premise. You do not want to give up the premise? Then you must give up the logic, the rules of inference, you used to derive the consequence. You cannot give them up? But then you have to accept the consequence, the conclusion. You don't want to? Well, I suppose you don't want clarity and integration of your views and your personality." The rationality of a total view like Spinoza's is perhaps the only form of rationality able to break down the pseudo-rational thinking of the conservative technocracy which now obstructs the effort to think in terms of the total biosphere and its development in the near and remoter future.

Philosophical premises of environmentalism

Personally, I favor the kind of powerful premises represented in Chinese, Indian, Islamic, Hebrew, as well as in Western philosophy—namely those which have so-called *ultimate unity of all life* as a slogan. They do not hide the fact that big fish eat small ones, but stress the profound interdependence, the functional unity of such a biospheric magnitude that non-violence, mutual respect, feelings of identity, are always potentially there, even between the killer and the so-called victim. In many cultures the identification is not limited to life, but envelops the mineral world as well, making us conceive ourselves as genuine surface fragments of our planet, fragments capable of somehow experiencing the existence of all other fragments. A microcosm in macrocosm.

Another idea, right at the basis of a system from which the environmental norms are derivable, is that of self-realization. The mature human individual, with a widened self, acknowledges a right to self-realization that is universal, and seeks a social order, or rather a biospherical order, which maximizes the potential for self-realization of all kinds of beings.

Level-headed and tough-minded environmentalists sometimes stress that it is sheer hypocrisy to pretend that we try to protect nature. In reality, they say, we always have the needs of human beings in view. This is false, I think. Thousands of supporters of unpolluted so-called "wastelands" in Northern Labrador simply wish that those lands should be there as they are. For their own sake. They are of intrinsic, not only instrumental, value. To invoke *specifically* human needs here is misleading, just as it is misleading to say that it is egotistical to share one's birthday cake with others because one *likes* to share with others.

Self-realization is not maximal realization of the coercive powers of the ego. The "self" in the kinds of philosophy I am alluding to is something expansive, and the environmental crisis may turn out to be of immense value for the further expansion of human consciousness.

In modern education the difference between a world picture—or better, a world model—and a straightforward description of the world is slurred over. Atoms, particles, wave functions are presented as parts or fragments of nature, even as *the real*, objective nature, as contrasted with the human projections into nature—the "colorful" but subjective nature.

But so-called physical reality, in terms of modern science, is perhaps only a piece of abstract mathematical reality—a reality we emphatically do not live in. Let us use π as an illustration. If our mathematical colleagues are not all wrong, somewhere far out in the infinite decimal expansion of π, all our telephone numbers appear, one after another, arranged alphabetically, and there appears, somewhere else, one million zeros followed by the number of our year minus 3. These fragments of the unending decimal series *exist*—let us agree to that—but let us also agree that the term "to exist" does not have much to do with our living environment. That environment is made up of all the colorful, odor-filled, ugly or beautiful details, and it is sheer folly to look for an *existing* thing without color, odor, or any other homely qualities.

Philosophically, there are great problems in this area. The main one is not too difficult to formulate: take a walk in wintertime with one hand in your pocket and the other exposed to the wind. Put both hands in water when you get back home. It happens that according to one of the hands the water *is* cold, according to the other hand the water *is* warm. Broadly speaking, the Western philosophical tradition favors the view that *in reality* the water is neither cold nor warm, these qualities somehow being created in our brains, or somehow projected into the water. The Eastern tradition tends more in the direction of saying: both! That is, the water is both warm and cold, the cold hand perceiving the warmth, the warm hand getting to know the coldness.

Contradiction? Can the water have both qualities? Yes, because the negation of "x is warm" is "it is not so that x is warm," and the negation of "x is cold" is "it is not so that x is cold." The two sentences "x is cold" and "it is not so that x is warm" are *not* synonymous, therefore there is no logical contradiction in holding them both to be true. It is only necessary to modify our ways of conceiving the relation between reality and appearance.

I think this "*both* cold and warm" theory is the best one proposed so far. It is devastating to the usual classroom view—namely, that the so-called primary sense qualities, movements, shape, and solidity, etc., are real, objective qualities, whereas colors, odors, etc., the secondary and tertiary qualities, are subjective, somehow created in a so far utterly inexplicable way, or by means of certain cellular processes in the brain.

The significance of this subject is a broad cultural one: the rehabilitation of the status of the immediately experienced world, the colorful and joyful world. *Where* is joy in the world of fact? Right at the Center! □

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DAVID CROWNFIELD

THE CURSE OF ABEL

An Essay in Biblical Ecology

> Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to Yahweh an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And Yahweh had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. (Genesis 4:2-5)

Discussion of Cain and Abel has usually centered on the fratricide, and on the mark placed on Cain as a curse. The story is sometimes interpreted as a second account of the fall of man, this time as a result of jealousy rather than of curiosity.

But stories of the fall never explain enough. Why did Yahweh accept Abel's offering and not Cain's? Later in the story, we read that Yahweh told Cain that his offering would be accepted if he did well; but by then it had already been rejected, and we are nowhere told that Cain had done anything wrong. The only difference between the brothers that we are given is that Cain raised grain while Abel raised sheep. Is this the basis of Yahweh's discrimination between them?

Apparently it is. The Hebrews, especially in pre-monarchical days, were sheep-raising people, engaged in a struggle for land and for cultural survival against the grain-growers who already occupied Palestine. From that point of view, it is hardly surprising that they imagined their God accepting a sheep-man's sacrifice and rejecting that of the wheat-farmer, with no further explanations.

Ecologically, though, Yahweh's choice seems disastrously wrong. Sheep are the original non-recycling economy. They overgraze their pasture and leave it to erosion, unless they are moved on in time to permit its recovery. The culture of Israel was that of semi-nomads, precisely because of this continuing necessity for sheep and goat raisers to move the flock to new pasture. This semi-nomadic life style meant that the ancestors of the Hebrews never had a settled homeland, and therefore necessarily yielded all the best territory to settled and fortified agricultural societies. The Hebrews moved along the periphery, between desert and settlement, shifting according to season, moisture, or the temporary strength or weakness of the settled people, stopping near some oasis for a time but always, sooner or later, having to move on in quest of new pasture.

This style of life profoundly affected the consciousness of the people. Their social organization was tribal and patriarchal. Their loyalty was to the group rather than to a place. The basic structure of their common experience was linear, narrative, sequential, a meaningful chain of events and travels and contingencies integrated by their tribal significance. The transcendent, the divine, was an ingredient of experience not through the cyclical rhythm of nature in a particular environment; God showed himself to them in a battle, a storm, a summons from one place to another, a miraculous escape, an unexpected spring. Not repetition, but dramatic novelty, is the foundation of their survival, the recurrent theme of their religion, and therefore a basic organizing principle of their consciousness.

The Western emphasis on narrative, on event, on historical meaning and direction, on movement, on finding the real and the fulfilling somewhere else than here, has deep roots in this tradition. The God of the West is the God of sheep-herding semi-nomadic tribes. His revelation is an interruption of the natural, rather than its fuller disclosure, and calls those whom it addresses to move out of the present environment, to get somewhere, to use up and leave behind the animal and vegetable, water and energy cycles of a given ecosystem.

The interpretive organization of Western consciousness has been deeply and centrally shaped by this nomadic perspective. Our tradition has continually repeated, elaborated, and imitated the images of Abraham and Jacob migrating to a better life; of Moses leading an escape out of slavery toward a promised land; of Joshua invading and seizing "a land flowing with milk and honey"; of Samuel, David, Solomon moving and changing and expanding their world.

After the defeat of national Israel by Babylon in 587 B.C., the nomadic sheepherding mentality persists in the consciousness of emerging Judaism. Promises of a new migration, a new return, are the poetry of hope by which Israel is held together in exile. "Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill made low, the crooked straight and the rough places a plain . . . He shall feed his flock like a shepherd. He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and gently lead those that are with young." (Isaiah 40:4, 11). And they will once again migrate out of trouble

Promising a new migration, as a means of holding the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tribe together in exile, turned out to have a flaw. "All flesh is grass . . . The grass withers." (Isaiah 40:6f). The natural reality of death threatens to cut off individuals from sharing in the promised migration back to green pastures. But the prophet offers the individual no comfort, no appreciation of the integral role of death in life. His word is rather that, though the grass withers, "The word of our God will stand forever" (verse 8). Yahweh will fulfill his promise by leading the tribe in a new move. The individual should identify his lot with that of the tribe and its future fulfillment, and thus be reconciled to his individual mortality. Neither the cycle of his own life nor the cycles of the place where he lives need be closed, for fulfillment lies not in closing the circle, but in belonging to the tribe which is going to be led by a divine shepherd to greener pastures.

In the following centuries, messianic and apocalyptic Judaism continues to look to contingencies, dramatic interventions, rescues, overthrow of enemies. The reflowering of the land is expected as divine miracle rather than as ecological readjustment. Whether this futurism is expressed in political anticipation of a new David or in hope of a supranatural intervention by a Son of Man coming from the clouds, the present is to be negated, left behind, abandoned with all its problems and defects.

The crisis centering in the Maccabean revolt around 165 B.C. gave further impetus to the belief that the problems of the present are going to be resolved in a dramatic, interventionist future. After Roman expansion had suppressed this brief Jewish independence in the next century, the old promises of the wilderness-god as miraculous intervener took on still more vigor. The Hebraic understanding of reality as a history of dramatic events, so often praised by Christian apologists, has in this period a clear tone of escapism. It still relies on the migratory model, conceiving existence as a migration through this world toward a better future.

Not all of Judaism took this turn. Especially after the disastrous rebellions of 66 and 132 A.D., the predominant line of interpretation in Judaism, from the Pharisees through the Talmud, is profoundly ecological. It does not completely abandon the eschatological promise that God will ultimately restore the people to their pasture; but in ritual, in tradition, and in the fantastically intricate elaboration of the law, it gives priority to the mutual adjustment and accommodation of the people to their present environment.

But to probe the ecological import of the Biblical roots of Western consciousness, the chief emphasis in the first century A.D. must lie not with the Pharisees but with a more marginal and exotic, less accommodating Jewish sect, the followers of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

The figure of Jesus is ecologically somewhat ambiguous. The distinctive parables of nature and of rural life imply one sort of relation to environment. But the strident proclamation of an eschatological rescue, just about to occur, points away from accommodation and from closing life cycles, toward a migratory, dramatic, escapist view, that the degradation of this present world is solved by pulling up tents and moving out. This migratory approach heavily predominates in the Gospel picture of Jesus.

The ambiguity is resolved by Paul on the side of migration out of the present into the future. Sexual questions, economic questions, legal questions—all are to be resolved from the point of view that the time is short, the present is passing away, and a better future is about to be given to the believers (I Corinthians 5-7).

The very concept of a "believer" seems to go back to Abraham's trusting that, if he migrated at God's call, he would prosper. Faith is, at its core, the willingness to abandon the deteriorating pasture and trust the tribal leader in his quest for a new one. While this view is reflected in Paul, it is most clearly developed in the book of Hebrews.

> Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen . . . By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain . . . By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob . . .
>
> These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland . . . They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. (Hebrews 11:1-16 exc.)

Christianity from its earliest years viewed faith in this nomadic way. However indirect the migratory theme in Paul's own writing, his repeated assertions that Christians are justified by faith "in Jesus Christ" have consistently been interpreted in Christendom in accordance with the book of Hebrews. The brokenness of our present life cycles and the degradation of our present pastures is overcome by trusting the messianic shepherd, who will lead us, as Abraham was led, out of our homeland toward a new and heavenly pasture. Our "justification" (which means not only our healing, but our restoration to membership in the authentic tribe of Yahweh) is obtained through trusting the leader who promises the tribe a yet-unseen heavenly homeland.

The resurrection of Jesus is not, like the resurrection of Osiris, a miracle of closing and renewing the cycle of life and death. It is a once-only, contingent miracle, like those of old. It divides, rather than unites, what was before and after. It offers the believer a precedent for his own desire for a miraculous intervention which would fulfill the ancient promises. It does not reconcile men to the unity of life and death, of consciousness and the earth; it permanently violates that unity. In death itself we will dwell only temporarily, as strangers and migrants, ready to pick up our tents and move when we are called. Death is only another of the vicissitudes that beset us as we travel toward our final home.

In the second and third centuries, Christianity secures its eventual success by interpreting its message in Persian and Greek categories which assume an antagonism between matter and spirit, and between eternal reality and changing appearance. But success on those terms only secures and radicalizes the alienation of men from our present life in and with the rest of the world.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At this juncture in the cultural history of Christianity, the doctrine of the immortal soul, despite its scanty Biblical basis, becomes a central and controlling concept. The individual person comes to be seen as a non-material, essentially timeless entity, migrating through a physical, bodily pasture. That pasture is used, exhausted, and left behind in a further migration to the heavenly homeland. The historical futurism of ancient Judaism at least lived authentically in this world, even though it looked to the future as a greener pasture than the present. Hellenized and Persianized Christianity reduces life, body, earth, and time to disposable containers, non-cyclical, non-renewable and temporary. The earlier Biblical doctrine of a general resurrection had at least given final affirmation to this world, even though that affirmation depended on miraculous restoration. But through the centuries the belief in resurrection becomes increasingly remote, and immortality in heaven, abandoning the exhausted and eroded earth, becomes the form of Christian hope.

In probing the Biblical ancestry of Western consciousness for the roots of our impending ecological disaster, we should also examine the role in planting those roots which was played by that most Biblical and most modern of theologians, John Calvin. Much has already been said relating Calvin to capitalism, to the work-ethic, to the secularization of earth and sky which opened it to scientific and technological activity, to "Puritan" sensual austerity, to the interpretation of prosperity as a sign of God's blessing. From all these conceptual roots, it is said, has grown the modern world and its problems.

The key to Calvin's contribution to our conception of the world and of our role in it lies in two related attitudes. One attitude is that this world is here for men's respectful but vigorous and temporary use; the other is that Christian faith has implications for every aspect of individual and social behavior. The natural world is secular, instrumental, free of inherent values, and temporary; yet it is the scene and raw material for human faithfulness and diligence in making the most, and the best, of our temporary sojourn here. It is therefore to be used to the utmost. Calvinism thus obligates men to graze this earthly pasture to its roots. Only by the fullest use of this temporary stopping-place do we show our readiness to migrate to our true home.

This is a profoundly creative and powerful conception in relation to social order, economic growth, and technological development. Whether it is cause or ideological reflection of the dynamic of the modern Western world, it gives voice to its deepest sources. But, despite its ethical and political dynamism, it is aesthetically, emotionally, and ecologically catastrophic. The Calvinist is always busy doing, never sensually or tranquilly enjoying. His relation to the earth is to dominate, exploit, and extract, rather than to coexist in the closed circle of our common life.

In its direct, political impact, Calvinism is a main source of the New England polity—democratic, rational, excruciatingly just. And the conception of America, later of the American West, as greener pasture, promised land, underlies the whole formation of the national population and consciousness. At the same time, less overtly, Calvinism serves as a root of the exploitive, dominating, imperialistic role of America in the world which can already be seen in the business dealings of that same colonial New England. While colonialism and imperialism are not a Calvinist invention, that overwhelming goal-directed rationality, that thorough inclusion and exhaustion of everything which Calvin exemplified and evoked gives the exploitive relation of the West to the rest of the world a devastating effectiveness.

I am not here laying at the door of Calvinism alone the responsibility for the present crisis. I focus on Calvin because Calvinism plays a major part, though not the only one, in incorporating into the roots of modern consciousness the God who prefers Abel's sacrifice to Cain's, who is known in the contingent drama of survival of ecologically-destructive semi-nomads, and who calls on all his creatures to regard this world as a pasture, to be grazed to its roots and then abandoned to the desert.

2.

There do exist within the Biblical tradition resources for an alternative view. To force these resources to cover up the migratory-destructive tradition and produce some sort of Christian ecological theology would be too much; if, as I have argued, the migratory element in the Christian view of God, the soul, and the world is inescapably central and culturally controlling, it can not be retrieved by picking out a set of half-forgotten elements on the other side. None the less, those elements exist, and they may offer the inhabitants-and-victims of the migrant tradition some constructive alternative resources for ecological living.

In the Garden of Eden before the fall, humankind were to eat freely of the trees of the garden. A fruit-gathering economy is virtually the opposite of a sheep-grazing one; it lives on the recurrent product of a stable plant system, capable of regeneration through reseeding by only a small fraction of that product. Every animal and bird is created not for human exploitation but for company and help for man. Had it not been for the fall, Genesis implies, humankind would have lived as friend of the other animals in a rich, self-sustaining environment, surviving on the freely-available by-products of a mature and complex ecosystem.

The fall, however understood or explained, disrupts this ecosystem. Because of his own wrongdoing, man becomes alienated from the natural garden, and he lives thereafter by cultivation of plants and killing of animals—a far more taxing economy than before, even if it had not been interpreted as a curse and burden to be struggled with. To view birth and death as curse and burden is anti-natural; but attributing these negativities to the fall expresses also a sense that the suffering and trouble with which we live in the world are our own doing. We suffer because of self-alienation from the garden.

God creates the earth in seven days, placing everything in balance and order. Of each day's work, we are told, "And God saw that it was good"; of the whole, "Behold, it was very good." Indeed, God finished his good work with a day to spare, and rested—presumably with enjoyment and satisfaction at what he had created. His standing back to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

enjoy his creation, beginning its history with a day of rest, contrasts with the restless diligence with which we now exploit and destroy it.

The whole concept of the Sabbath, which is anchored in this divine day of rest, is such a letting-be. Not the later obsession with what is and is not prohibited on the sabbath, but the original, restful letting-be, has profoundly ecological implications. Not only can we interrupt our compulsive work to let the goodness of creation have its day of rest and recovery. The Sabbath gives to laborers, servants, and sojourners a day's free relief from struggle, a day to rest and enjoy, rather than strive and exploit. Even the migrants interrupt their wandering for a day's ease.

In settled Israel, the sabbath concept was extended further, though in a law which was rarely carried out. In the seventh year, the law prescribes, the cultivated fields are to be left fallow. Slaves are to be set free. In the jubilee year of seven times seven, the dispossessed are returned to the land (Leviticus 25). Sabbath is a concept of relaxing, of freeing, of recycling, of allowing the overburdened earth and overburdened people a time of grace to recover.

The limit on exploitation of the earth and of poor people is expressed also in other ways. A law in Leviticus (19:9f and 23:22) says, "You shall not reap your field to its very border . . . and you shall not strip your vineyard bare . . .; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner." This provision, like the one to leave the field fallow in the Sabbath year, is directly counter to the sheep-grazing style of life; it forbids exploiting the earth beyond its capacity to recover, or even to its apparent limit.

The basic rituals of ancient Israel are also ecologically ambiguous. The Passover tradition in its fully developed form celebrates an ethnic triumph and migratory escape in the deliverance from Egypt, and is therefore potentially divisive and destructive. Scholars, however, regard this element of Passover as a later reinterpretation of earlier agricultural new-year rituals. The migratory sheep-herders have superimposed a tribal, narrative, interventionist interpretation on an older cyclical observance.

Annually discarding all leaven and beginning a new year with unleavened bread puts a limit to how far the people can get from the earth. With every new year, the new grain begins a new fermentation; the old leaven, millions of generations from its origins, is discarded. The life of the leaven, like the grain, must be received each year as a new gift from the earth. The ritual thus remembers and celebrates that we receive our life and sustenance from the earth, and must always turn again to it for renewal. The dedication to Yahweh of the first fruits of the womb, though it often involves killing the animal, similarly acknowledges the transcendence of the source of life, and takes it as a gift rather than for granted.

The major prophets of Israel are primarily concerned with human justice and faithfulness. But there is in their work a sense of the earth which is often neglected. Amos attributes to the injustice of the society all sorts of environmental consequences. Because the leaders of Israel have been greedy, exploitive, and lacking justice and compassion, Yahweh is troubling the land. There is drought and famine, water shortage, blight, mildew, locusts, disease (Amos 4:6-9). Amos sees all this as divine intervention for the purpose of warning and punishing those who violate Yahweh's will. At the same time, it does express clearly Amos' sensitivity to what is happening to the earth, and his conviction that ecological crisis derives from greed and injustice.

The same theme is found in Isaiah, where the connection is made even more explicit.

> Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land. Yahweh of hosts has sworn in my hearing: "Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah."
>
> (Isaiah 5:8-10)

Jeremiah is the prophet who most explicitly and firmly sets himself against the destructive traditions. His treasonable work during the siege of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., when he went among the troops urging them in the name of Yahweh to desert to the Babylonians because the war was futile, has a disturbing resemblance to recent events. But ecologically the key statement is a letter Jeremiah wrote to those exiles who had already been taken captive to Babylon in 598 B.C. The prophets among them, like the second Isaiah a few years later, offered a migratory solution to the people's predicament. Stay loose, you are about to move again, out of trouble, back to home, they said.

Jeremiah gave different advice:

> Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to Yahweh on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream, for it is a lie which they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says Yahweh.
>
> (Jeremiah 29:7-9)

Jeremiah does go on to promise the people a restoration, but only after they have settled and adjusted, and lived in a natural relation to their world for two generations. The futurist fulfillment is not absent; but it is held off into a real future, beyond the lives of his hearers, and they are to live and die in the city where they have been sent, and to find their welfare in the welfare of their environment.

The post-exilic literature is, as we have seen, heavily futuristic and migratory. A single and extraordinary exception is Ecclesiastes. For the Preacher, all the toil and struggle of goal-directed man is in vain, and novelty and drama are illusory. Everything has already been and will be. Existence is utterly cyclical; it is good, but temporary, and returns to the earth.

> For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
> a time to be born, and a time to die;
> a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
> a time to kill, and a time to heal; . . .
> What gain has the worker from his toil.
>
> (Ecclesiastes 3:1-3, 9)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> [God] has made everything beautiful in its time . . . There is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; . . . it is God's gift to man that every one should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil.
>
> (3:11-13)

> For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts.
>
> (3:19)

Ecclesiastes has virtually an Epicurean point of view. This life is all; it is material, it is mortal, it is vulnerable to random events. Whatever is to be had is to be had in its time, beautiful and pleasing for the moment but utterly without a future. Such reconciliation of man to time and death, to his kinship with beasts and his origin and destiny in the ground, provides a perspective for coexistence, for acceptance of our earthly destiny, for closing the circle of breath and dust, which has more ecological promise than does the conception of this present earth as merely an oasis in our migration to a better future.

We have already noticed the ambiguity of Jesus' relation to the earth. The apocalyptic futurism of the Synoptic Gospels, and also the trans-earthly spirituality of the Gospel of John, call upon us to vacate this present earth as an exhausted pasture. Less dominant, yet positive and unmistakable, the other side is also there. Jesus speaks of God sending the sun and rain equally on the just and the unjust. He notes that the birds and the field flowers live on the earth without toil and spinning, and are nourished; his hearers are called to give up anxiety about food and clothing, and receive what God gives.

Jesus is shown as bringing healing, sight, restoration of the natural conditions of life, rather than escape. He enjoys eating and drinking, rather than being ascetic and life-negating; yet he is not a consumer and waster, but accepts moderately what comes to a simple life. He identifies his work with the finding of a lost sheep, with the growth of a shrub, with the scattering of seed. He calls his hearers to the humility of children. His sacrament is a simple common meal. He accepts his death openly, with an agony apparently unmitigated by any compensating futurism.

The overt eschatological message of Jesus is thoroughly migratory and escapist. But the style of his life and teaching has a deep closeness to the earth, to which Christians of later centuries have often responded but which the orthodox theological tradition has neglected.

Probably the most remarkable representative of the tradition—largely a lay people's unofficial tradition—stemming from Jesus' closeness to the earth is Francis of Assisi. Francis was thoroughly futuristic in his expectation of salvation, and, unlike Jesus, he was a self-negating ascetic in his life. But his emphasis on poverty and humility goes beyond self-mortification; there is a thankful and joyous note to it. Francis clearly regards life itself as a gift far more valuable than any variation or improvement of the conditions of life. The legends of his preaching to the birds, of taming a wolf, of freeing doves bound for market, show a man who knows his kinship with the earth and its other inhabitants. His poverty seems to stem rather from a lack of desire for more than he needs for mere sustenance than it does from any hostility to life. His dedication to service of the poor and ill, to companionship with all living things, to restoration of humble churches, to spreading the life of grateful poverty and service to the earth, are all restorative, earth-loving, ecologically constructive roles.

3.

The imperialistic, over-grazing model of Calvin is easier to follow than the grateful, earth-loving humility of Francis. And it is Calvin's view that has the more deeply shaped our modern western consciousness. The two are, indeed, mismatched in this discussion. It is not the kinship with Sister Earth, but the historical-dramatic consciousness, the futurism, the view of the earth as a resource to be exhausted, the sense of this life as a transition rather than as a whole and final reality, that form the very shape of Western consciousness. The roots of this consciousness lie far back, in the unique experience of sheep-raising, ecologically-destructive semi-nomads, accustomed to overgraze and move on.

The alternative strain cannot truly even be called a competing tradition. It is, in our cultural history, a minor note. The earth-love of Jesus and Francis has always appealed to humble people and to romantics. But it has not formed the basic grain of Western consciousness; it has simply been one charming aspect of the variable content of that consciousness. When hard decisions were made, the migration view always seemed to overcome the earth view.

The difficulty with the migratory view is, of course, that the pasture is limited. To continue to overgraze it, expecting to move on, is to destroy the capacity of the earth to recover. Not only must the shepherds make their peace with the grain-growers, but we must settle down, plant gardens, and seek the welfare of the place where we find ourselves. The earth must be allowed its sabbath rest and recovery. We must recover the lost garden of coexistence in friendship with the other creatures of the earth. The earth itself brings us the prophetic judgment, and also the message of the Preacher that striving is vanity and that our joy is to be found in reconciliation to the cycles of life and death.

We cannot culturally disinherit ourselves. Futurism is deeply ingrained, and cannot itself be abandoned for some cultural migration. The resources for survival must be rooted in our cultural consciousness, as are the dynamics of disaster. Perhaps, if we face honestly the escapist, futurist, exploitive structure of our God and our tradition, we can be freer to search for that tradition's more constructive resources. And perhaps some of those resources lie in the sabbath tradition, in the image of our origins in the earth-as-good-garden, in the prophets' sense of a link between our greedy injustice and the degradation of the earth, and in the Preacher's celebration of time, of cycles, of a life ending in death, lived out joyously on the earth.

Perhaps the figure of Jesus as man of the earth, and the ecological affirmation so frequent in his parables and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STEPHEN DOBYNS

RUNNING

The sky is what I see
of the hand of which the sky
is the center.

The hand on the sheet
is beginning to close.
The sheet closes up within it.
I am in a far place,
getting farther.

Two stones—I make a wall.
Two stones across from it,
another wall. A line of stones
beneath me. Now I am running.

The hand above me
is beginning to close.
Fingers draw up the horizon.
Silence is the wind within the hand.
Which winter is this one?

One to hide from;
one to take with me. The wall
falls behind me as my fingers
press into it.
Love, speak to me quickly.

A finger touches my voice.
My voice is gone. It touches
my hands. They are gone.
Feet gray, getting grayer;
dark place I am running through.

The sheet becomes part of the hand
as you begin to recede. Be
careful, Love. Where am I
coming from when I leave you behind?

The sky closes. The sun
breaks apart. Falling over me
it becomes the ashes
of the place I have run through.
What chance to say goodbye?

teachings, is more saving for our earthly predicament than his eschatological message. Perhaps Francis' humility, friendship with all his brother and sister creatures, and glad reconciliation to life and death offers a broader and more promising model than the Calvinist's diligence.

At any rate, we had better not worship any god who prefers the sacrifice of Abel to that of Cain, for he leaves the mark of his curse on us as well. If we are to look to gods at all, it must be to one that teaches us to seek the welfare of the place where we find ourselves, for only in its welfare will we find our welfare.

Postscript: The preceding article was developed independently, in response to the national conference on Education for Survival held at the University of Northern Iowa in April, 1973. I cannot, however, ignore the fact that it lands me in the middle of a controversy of some years' standing, beginning with Lynn White's article, "The Historic Roots of Ecological Crisis", in *Science* in March, 1967, and most recently expressed in Rene Dubos criticism of White's view, "St. Francis vs. St. Benedict", in the May, 1973, *Psychology Today* (excerpted from *A God Within,* Scribners, 1972).

White's article attends largely to mediaeval origins of modern science and technology, though he does suggest that an earlier and more basic root of the problem lies in "Judaeo-Christian teleology." He also develops at some length the point that Christian theology made man the center of the universe, and enjoined him to subdue and exploit the earth. He concludes with an appeal to St. Francis as advocate of a democracy or brotherhood of all creatures, and proposes to recognize him as "a patron saint for ecologists."

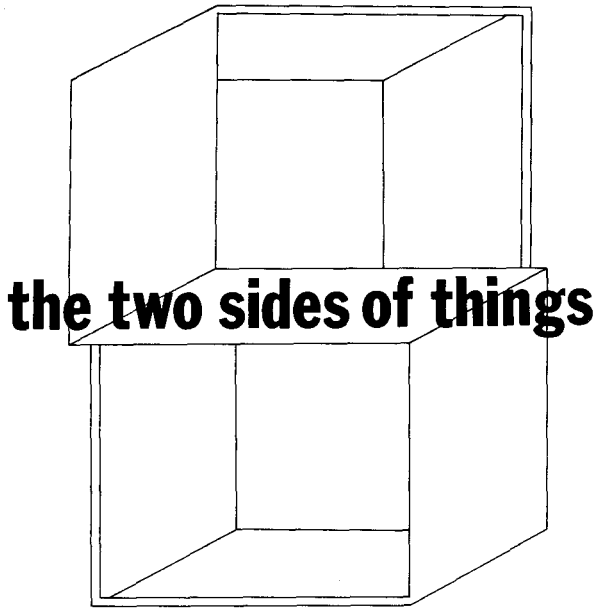
The essay above attempts to explore the roots and development of that "Judaeo-Christian teleology", and the context and meaning of the injunction to subdue the earth. It is thus in harmony with White's view, and attempts to radicalize it and show its foundations.

Dubos denies any special Judaeo-Christian root of the modern crisis. He points to Greek, Chinese, and other examples of ecological destruction. He criticizes what he calls Francis' "absolute identification with nature" and its implication that man should become merely "a passive witness of nature." Dubos commends instead the example of the mediaeval Benedictines, who actively and moderately developed the land, clearing, draining, cultivating. The monks developed technology and increased exploitation of the land, but only in a limited and balanced fashion, restrained by their own discipline of daily manual labor.

Dubos is right, of course, that ecological destruction has happened in all parts of the world. And he is surely right that the Benedictine monasteries of early mediaeval Europe were a benevolent institution. He is, however, quite wrong to suppose that Francis "worshipped" or "absolutely identified with" nature. Humble brotherhood is not worship, nor is Francis merely "a passive witness." The central importance of Francis is not that he provides a behavioral model for imitation; what he provides for us is a basic evaluation of the place of humankind in the world. Humility, gentleness, and respect for our brother and sister creatures are deeply needed. Perhaps these qualities could be combined with Benedictine manual work with the earth; but they need not be—and had best not be—displaced by it.

The critical difference between the present essay and Dubos' position lies in the level of analysis. Dubos points to the degradation of environment by many different peoples. But there is a difference between the destruction that derives accidentally from ignorance and that which is the normal consequence of a basic attitude about life and the earth. The ancient Greeks depleted their land by accident; as soon as they understood what was happening, they adapted through development of a stable economic-ecologic system. Modern western man, in contrast, has a basically exploitive, transient attitude about the earth which is *inherently* destructive. Dubos' article does not discuss this problem but I assume it and have attempted both to show its roots and to indicate some resources for a possible alternative. —*D. C.*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



the two sides of things

A Story by

Gordon Weaver

Don't continually say *hit me.*" My Uncle Adolph spoke clearly without taking his black and silver cigarette holder from between his teeth. "It irritates the dealer," he said—he meant that it irritated him. "All you need do is scrape the edge of the table like this," he said, rasping the dining room table's felt pad with the edges of the deck of cards, as though he were sweeping crumbs toward his lap. "The dealer knows that way you want another card, and you don't have to irritate people by saying the same thing all the time. Now," he said, "try it." I scraped with the card in my hand. "Good," my uncle said, "now let's get on with the game." He waited, one eyebrow raised, for me to call for yet another card.

With the five of clubs in my hand, it made eighteen. He had a jack showing. "I'm good," I said; I knew better than to say something like *I think I have all I want.* "I'm good," I repeated, wanting to be sure he noticed I remembered the correct words.

"I heard you the first time," he said, and, "Dealer pays twenty-one," said with confidence as he flipped over his blind card, a king. I swallowed my disappointment and pushed my cards over to him. He clenched his teeth, making the cigarette holder jut erectly up from his mouth, as he added to his score on the pinochle tablet he kept just to his right on the dining room table. It made him look a little like a thin President Roosevelt, in the famous photograph with his pince-nez and cigarette holder.

I remember my uncle, marking the score with a ballpoint pen, a fairly new product then—it was 1948, and Uncle Adolph was convinced they would not last on the market. I was eleven, so never dreamed of second-guessing him. He was drubbing me unmercifully. He kept score in dollars, blackjack at a dollar a hand, casino at a dime a point; he said it was more interesting that way.

"You're forty bucks in the hole," he said to me. "In Vegas that's small change for the one-arm bandits. You couldn't get your hands on the dice with a roll no bigger than that." I nodded, seeing my Aunt Osa look up to smile very tolerantly at her husband's back. She sat at her escritoire, visible to me over my uncle's shoulder, on those evenings we played cards. Either she read, translating with moving lips, in an inaudible interior whisper, the Spanish of *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, or worked at her correspondence with the authors of cook books all over the world. The Spanish Club of Waukegan, Illinois, and the art of cooking—these were her world.

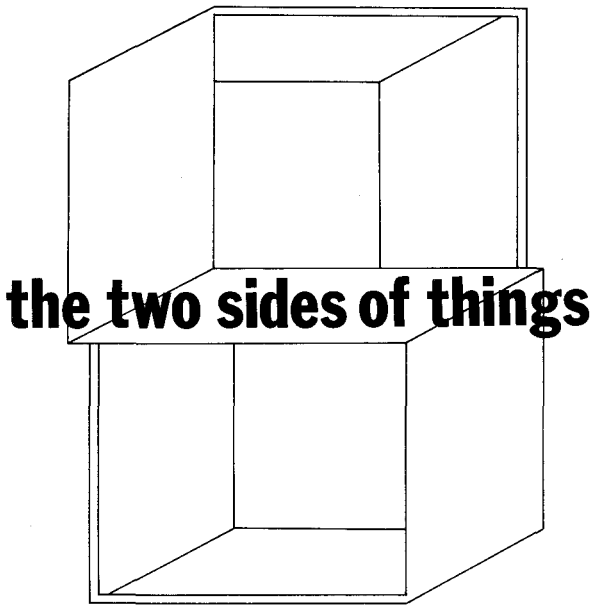
And that is the capsule, the essence of my memory of them: Uncle Adolph, inserting a fresh Sano into his filter-holder; it carried a cartridge, filled with crystals which blackened, signaling time for a change of filter; shuffling the cards while he eyed me through the smoke wreathing his head, like a Vegas sharper about to take a fat pigeon fresh from Cedar Rapids with the egg money burning a hole in his bib overalls.

Aunt Osa: quietly prevailing in a spotless domestic comfort richened by elaborate menus and the time-resistant excellence of Cervantes.

My aunt's watchful control was, of course, smothering to me then, and my uncle's shameless crowing over cards was galling, but when I came to stay with them there in Waukegan, which was frequent the year my father died of a liver disorder, I think I became a real person, in my sense of the word, for the first time in my life. That in itself makes them worth remembering, makes them worth cherishing in memory—I was only eleven, and it might have been less pleasant.

Because there was chaos and crisis at home, in Gary, Indiana, because of my father's alcoholism (aquavit is especially destructive of the liver), my mother sent me away often that last year . . . to give me a more *homey* atmosphere, as she would have put it. My other aunts, Anna and Claire, lived in Chicago, but were less suitable, both being divorced. Aunt Claire had lived alone in Chicago since the 'twenties, when she cut something of a figure there after arriving from the family homestead, downstate in Hambro, Illinois, a farm town settled almost exclusively by Swedes.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



the two sides of things

I suppose the era was too exciting for my Aunt Claire's marriage to last. Her husband had something to do with bootlegging, and she would admit, if I persisted, that a fellow she went about with for a time ended up face down on the floor of a garage on a particular St. Valentine's Day.

Aunt Anna's husband, my Uncle Knute, had become wealthy during the second war, selling a part of a machine that made a part of a machine that made something useful in war. They were divorced when he took up with a woman he met in Minneapolis on a business trip. Aunt Anna's divorce was too recent, in 1948, for my mother to foist me on her. So I was sent to Aunt Osa's and Uncle Adolph's.

I was attracted to this uncle to begin with. For one thing, he detested my name—I was given *Oskar*, after my father and Grandfather Hansen both—as much as I did. I cannot recall him ever using it to speak to me. For another, he was not comfortable talking to his wife or her sisters, or my father (who was almost always inebriated), so he talked to me when we got together as a family. This is a novelty with some charm, when you are only eleven.

On the occasions we gathered, in Gary or Chicago, for birthdays, Christmas, and Thanksgiving, I was lost below the level of adults who recollected childhood days in Hambro, ate huge meals of (to me) unappetizing Swedish food, and drank aquavit with beer chasers, my aunts staying drink for drink with my father. In short, I was lonely; my aunts were all childless.

"Who's your favorite baseball player?" Uncle Adolph asked me, peering over the edge of the sports page. My father, for example, would never have thought to ask.

"Jackie Robinson," I said without thinking, merely eager to give an answer when someone had somehow taken the trouble to care if I had one. Uncle Adolph cared, indeed, frowning severely at my reply. I had answered too quickly, forgetting his background, as told to me by my mother and my aunts.

"What kind of an answer is that?" he said. "My God, is there any reason you can't have a white man for your favorite, boy?" He snapped the newspaper together and folded it against his chest. "What's the matter with Ewell Blackwell? Now there's a man to be your favorite. What's wrong with Ralph Branca if it has to be a Dodger?"

He could always intimidate me. I weakly mumbled that it did not have to be a Dodger—I thought a lot of Blackwell, and Branca, and Dixie Walker, too. At least we could agree that there was no use in caring for the limping Cubs or White Sox, either one.

My Uncle Adolph was born and raised in Memphis, and this part of him had not been exorcised by his travels. He was touchy about it, denying prejudice if my mother challenged him on it. He would respond with the story of betting on Jack Johnson against Stan Ketchel, which was, he smugly asserted, hardly the wager of a prejudiced man.

And he had traveled. He joined the navy in 1908 (an impossibly prehistoric date to me!) and prior to that had logged some time on merchant ships. I loved the stories he told, of course.

What I love about them, now, is that he told them with the idea, I think, of suggesting something special, something hideous, for example, that could not be spoken plainly of in front of women. Aunt Osa used to jokingly contend that she had civilized him, for all the Old South and its culture, by accepting his proposal there in Hambro, Illinois, when he showed up at the end of his travels to operate the telegraph for the Illinois Central Railroad in 1916. These impulses, his and hers, are at the center of my *person*, my being a person at about age eleven, in 1948.

There was, for instance, the story of his shipwreck off the Borneo coast.

"The damn ship rolled over on her side like a foundered horse. The suction must have taken the others down with her. I made the half-mile in from the reef, not knowing I was one of two survivors—" he said before I broke in. We were playing casino this time, and I was, as usual, losing heavily.

"Who was the other one?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Galley slavey," he said, "Cook's helper—boy, don't interrupt me that way!" He had some sense that my mother's sending me to stay for a few weeks involved his responsibility to teach me some masculine social manners. I did not mind; it implied my importance, that I must be worth the effort it cost him, that I was considered a potential gentleman, requiring such manners.

"It's *very* impolite to break into a man's story, boy! What's more, what did you forget?" He waited, grim behind the smoke of his Sano cigarette, while I tried hard to concentrate.

"*Sir*?"

"That's right, *Sir*. Show others respect and they'll respect you," he said. "You can walk with kings, and they'll respect you." He said this with a change in the expression around his eyes that tempted me to look behind me and see whether or not some royal entourage had, in fact, joined us from the kitchen to validate my uncle's proposition. What it expressed was the poignancy of his disappointment at never having walked with them himself—because he felt, I think, that they, those anonymous kings, *would* have respected him. In shaping my deportment he was treating his own sense of failure in life.

I recall this statement whenever I read the blurb saying horse racing is the sport of kings. Uncle Adolph also played the horses. After the fashion, that is, that his wife permitted. He subscribed to *Racing Form* and a couple of Chicago tout sheets; he concentrated on the season at Washington Park, recorded his bets, and the results, all without risking a single dollar. It was like our card games, all a controlled exercise of his pure fancy.

I have seen him sit close to my father on their visits to Gary, pushing his recorded bets between my father and the aquavit jug, pointing with the trembling tip of his mechanical pencil, showing my father how he was making a killing, killing upon killing, on the ponies.

"Look here," Uncle Adolph said, "three hundred this week, three seventy-five, three twenty, and this . . . this was a bad week, just over a hundred. A hundred is a *bad* week for me. Now repeat to me I'm dreaming. Right here in black and white . . ." Maybe he was trying to persuade my father to stake him for a real crack at the horses with his system, for Uncle Adolph, who pushed a pencil in the production control department for U.S. Steel in Waukegan, could not afford to bet much, and my Aunt Osa would not allow him to bet anything.

What he dreamed of was just exactly the kind of fast and fat win the horseplayer and gambler enjoy. And I believe he wanted me to know this. I believe it was important to my Uncle Adolph that I should perceive, and should respect this flash of colorful, exciting, dream-wish that lay buried beneath his steady, reliable, dull and aging exterior. The proper manners, he said, enabled you to walk with the kings of the earth . . . and I was meant to understand that he, at least, was up to it, at least in imaginative achievements, no matter how utterly absurd this all was against the realities of his life.

"As I was saying before you interrupted. I didn't know until morning that there was another survivor besides myself. We met on the beach in the first light of day after our ship went down on that reef." He paused, as if bracing himself to deal with another interruption, but I kept silence, and, over his shoulder, my aunt's lips moved soundlessly over her Spanish.

"We began to cut our way through the jungle, because we knew that it couldn't be too far to some civilization. The Dutch had naval installations in the area, but we'd heard that the locals sometimes took a man's head for a trophy without first asking his permission. We were ill-equipped. I had a revolver, a big single-action smoker—which I always carried on my person in those days—and my partner had a butcher knife, which he'd had sense enough to grab in the galley before he hopped over the ship's rail.

"We had been going about a day and a half. I heard him scream out behind me—I was breaking trail at the time—" Here he stopped, quite unashamed, for dramatic effect, and also, possibly, tempting me, to see if I had taken the lesson about interrupting to heart. He liked to do that, test my self-control. At blackjack, when he knew I was praying for a low card, a deuce or trey, at most, in order to come in under twenty-one with five cards, and so chip two dollars off my mounting losings, he would delay the flip of the fifth card off the top of the deck. Testing me. But I could do it if I tried.

"He screamed," he went on, "and I turned around with my pistol already on cock, but it was too late. Some breed of boa constrictor had dropped around his neck from the limb of a tree. He was dead before I could shoot. It happened that fast."

"Really? Sir?" I asked. He was too sensitive, and not so cruel, as to construe that I suspected the whole tale to be so much malarkey; he understood that I merely wanted its emotional reality confirmed, a last time, by the man before me, who was the very horse's mouth. It allowed him, too, the opportunity to plant the suggestion that is the crux, or his half of it, of the sense of *person*, of being, of oneself, of identity in time and place, that was his real gift to me.

"That's what I told the proper authorities, in any case," he said, leaning back in the dining room chair, the suggestion of the too-hideous in his eyes, the flash of his teeth clamped down on his cigarette filter-holder as he leered at me, his hand seeming to reach out, unwilled, to give the deck of cards a one-handed sharper's cut. Oh, he succeeded!

Sometimes, in the right mood, I still reserve the right to think it *was* pure malarkey; my uncle made it up out of whole cloth, simply to impress and delight me. But again, at other times, in other moods, I need—*need*—to believe there was something too terrible to give utterance. Might they not have argued over cards, for instance? Certain it is that my Uncle Adolph admired those who did it and got away with it, even if only for a short time.

I have heard him speak of the Chicago gangster who dated my Aunt Claire, the one killed on St. Valentine's Day. Uncle Adolph spoke of him, of his fashionable clothes, his fast car, the lump in his coat where his pistol rested, in a tone that made it clear he would have approved an alliance with that outlaw. He and Aunt Osa had rented a flat in Cicero for a time back then, and Uncle Adolph recalled the violence of bootlegging days fondly.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He had me stand up, there in the parlor in Waukegan, had me put out my hand to shake with him: I was acting the role of Deeny O'Banion, while my uncle was the uncaught gunsel sent to make the hit—my uncle had several theories about just how the gun was concealed in the killer's hand until the instant he raised it to fire. Uncle Adolph held that, morally, John Dillinger was more respectable than either the woman in red who fingered him, or the FBI agents who shot him down in front of the Biograph.

"Granted he was a thief and a murderer," my uncle said, "there was nothing wishy-washy about him. Good Indiana farmboy stock to begin with. Someday we'll have to drive over to Crown Point and see the grave where they say they buried what was left of him." I was eleven, and it was magnificent.

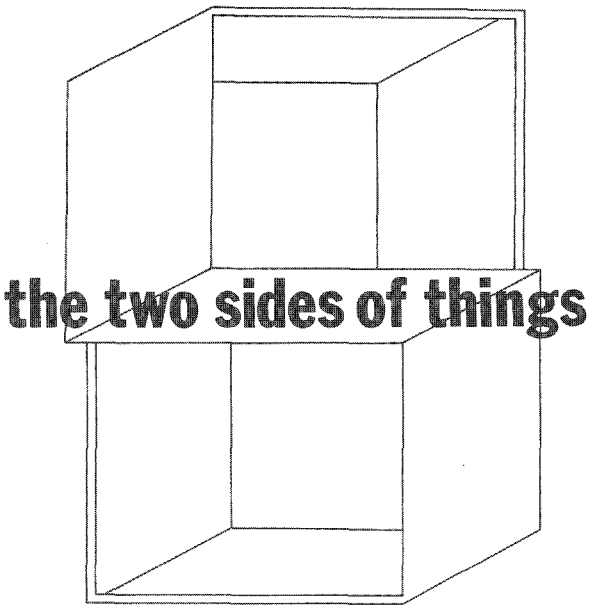
My Uncle Adolph disliked Jackie Robinson, because that was bred into him in Memphis. But he knew better than to bet on Stan Ketchel, and he admired Satchel Paige for holding onto his arm long past retirement age for ordinary men. Nigger or not, old Satchel was still getting away with it! He thought the Black Sox were simply dumb, because they got caught so quickly and easily, and Shoeless Joe Jackson the dumbest of the lot, because, unlike Eddie Cicotte and the others, he got no money out of it.

His all-time favorite baseball player was a man named Snodgrass, who had played third base, years before, for John McGraw's Giants. "He played third," my uncle said, "and he was something to wonder at. When a man was on third, waiting to tag up and go to beat the throw home on a long fly ball, this Snodgrass I'm telling you about would slip two fingers under the man's belt, pretending to play close to the bag. Snodgrass would hold him up, just for a split second, enough to keep him from making it to the plate ahead of the throw. They had a center fielder, I forget his name, with an arm like a rifle. He did it for more than a year. Nobody knew how long he got away with it but Snodgrass himself, I imagine. They finally caught him out." That was the way of the world, my uncle's voice implied; everyone always got caught out in the end, even Al Capone, and it was worse than unfair; it was tragic.

"Some wisacre thought to remove the buckle from his belt before he went up to hit. He got to third, there was a fly ball, he tagged up and took off, and there was Snodgrass with the ump and both teams and a park full of fans watching him, standing over the bag with the runner's belt in his hand."

Uncle Adolph looked away while lighting a fresh Sano; we grieved, both of us, for Snodgrass, and for the fact that nobody ever gets away with it in the end, ever.

It has to do with secrets. I learned that men have secrets that cannot bear telling—witness the forever uncertain demise of the cook's helper in the wilds of Borneo. I learned men have secret desires, for riches, for fast and fat triumphs that depend upon evil or inside information. Men want to walk with whoever passes for royalty in our country. I learned things are not what they seem, that behind my uncle's very ordinary facade lay elements unguessed by any except initiates to those secrets, like myself. What, for example, I began to wonder, waited inside my



own alcoholic father's stony and indifferent exterior for me to uncover? What might lie, in time, within me?

It has nothing to do with finding out secrets. It is only that they exist to baffle and fascinate us. This I learned, and became something other than I had been, as I looked up to watch my Aunt Osa, preoccupied at her escritoire. And I knew I had learned it, which is yet another secret of being alive.

One has to learn there are secrets, and then one has to learn to live with them. My uncle came to this, this learning, when he met my Aunt Osa. He may have learned it already, but he came to accept it when he married her.

In 1916, he was thirty years old, and outside his navy-taught skill as a telegrapher, and the stories gathered in his travels, he had nothing to show for his life. On the contrary, when he landed the job with the Illinois Central and came to Hambro, he had been used rather badly. He was underweight and sickly from the experience of his last job, working the key out of a tiny relay station near Utica, Mississippi. My aunt, it seemed to me, could always find some excuse to tell her side of it.

The casino and twenty-one were over for the night, but my uncle kept on talking and had gotten around to the general subjects of food and eating. I think he was telling me about the *frijoles refritos* he had eaten in Mexico once, the time he made a special trip across the border to meet and shake hands with Francisco Madero, who was encamped just south of Brownsville then. Uncle Adolph could not speak of food without bitterness, for he had had, a couple of years earlier, the ulcer operation that removed fourteen inches of his stomach. He evaded his rigid diet whenever he dared.

He said something like, "You take a gob of those beans on a *tortilla*, boy, and you dash some of that red sauce they grind up from peppers on a stone all over it, and then, by God, you stick the whole shebang right in your mouth . . ."

My aunt looked up from *Don Quixote*. I prefer to think

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she understood every bit of what his stories meant to me. I prefer to think she understood, and so determined that I should see the other side of it—her side; the second of those two sides people always say exist about any question of import. She was being deliberately fair, to me, not cruel to him.

She got up and came behind his chair. She put her hand on his shoulder, her wedding band prominent against the black of his unbuttoned vest. Although she pretended to be talking to him at first, her eyes never let go of mine.

"Oh," Aunt Osa said, "and why don't you tell him how much you liked goat meat." Uncle Adolph carefully placed another Sano in his filter-holder and lit it, turning off his attention, as though saying: I have heard all this before. This is for the boy, not me. I already know; I have already accepted.

"Adolph had a job relaying dispatches at some dinky little backwater station in Mississippi, just before he came to Hambro. The railroad paid a farmer and his wife to room and board him because it was the only house within miles of the station. The first morning there he found out what that was going to be like."

Uncle Adolph went *ungh*, once, but it may have been the smoke in his throat choking him.

"He stepped out of bed," my aunt went on, "straight smack dab with his bare foot in some goat dung." I giggled. "Yes! Right in the bedroom, and you could smell it all through the house! Goats in the house!" I think I laughed again, louder. My uncle shifted in his chair, pinned there by the gently resting weight of his wife's hand. She held me with her eyes.

"And how that woman fed him. Fried dough, just fried in deep fat, and coffee with chicory in it, and very rarely some ham, because they kept pigs, too. He nearly starved to death. He couldn't bring himself to complain, nor could he eat it.

"Then one day while he was working one of the man's fool goats was killed by a train. Your uncle ran up to the house to tell him, and the farmer got his knife and ran down to the tracks and bled the goat and dressed it out. Well they ate goat. It was the first decent meat he'd had in so long, and of course they had no refrigeration, so there was goat, fried in deep fat, meal after meal." My uncle swallowed audibly, and closed his eyes, pulled steadily on the bit of his cigarette filter-holder.

"When that ran out," Aunt Osa said, "it was back to fried dough again—because naturally the man wasn't going to care what he fed Adolph; he got paid for room and board regardless. Now tell Oskar what you did then . . . when you couldn't stand any more fried dough."

My uncle looked at me, opened his eyes, discovering an expression I had not seen before. He carefully knocked the ash from the tip of his Sano against the glass lip of the ashtray before he spoke. As if to say: no matter how ridiculous, no matter how humiliating, this *is* the truth. Like Alphonse Capone's income taxes and syphilis, there comes, finally, to all men, that *truth* that defies our desires, no matter what the grandeur, the enormity, or even the triviality. Yes, I understood: we dream secrets, all of us . . . they fail us, and we fail them. And we must live with that.

"I bided," Uncle Adolph said, as if he were reciting a piece committed to memory, "my time. Until I could be sure there was no one in sight. The farmhouse was over a rise, so it wasn't particularly difficult or long in coming. I enticed a goat down to my station shack, and tethered him there. Sometimes, later, I'd have it all planned, on a schedule, so as to have only a five or ten minute wait, me there holding the bleating goat by its horns. When the train came I shoved the goat under the wheels and ran for the house to tell the farmer. He'd get his knife."

"And they'd eat goat again," Aunt Osa said. "Goat meat fried in deep fat." She quaked at the thought of it. "And that," she said, "is what ruined your uncle's stomach." I knew he had had a very rough time with the ulcer operation; he never really recovered his health again, though he was not to die for many years to come. "If he'd stayed there longer before coming to work in Hambro he'd like to have died long ago as a result," she said. And she meant that, literally. And he believed it too. She had made her point; she went back to Cervantes, and my uncle squinted through cigarette smoke as he shuffled the cards for a last game of casino before my bedtime.

Later, that same night, when she had left the room, he leaned close to me to whisper, "God though, boy," he said, "that old farm woman could make a goat taste like something!"

He did not tell his stories of Borneo or Mexico to provoke her, and she did not bring up his bachelor absurdities to retaliate. They merely recognized, each, their respective strengths. He could not survive without the flavor of foolish dreams, and she knew no one dared try to live except with respect for reality. This is what each sought to teach me.

My father's mother, Grandmother Hansen, died giving birth to my father. Aunt Osa was nearly twenty then, and she shared the housekeeping with an old spinster woman named Sorenson, who had more or less tagged along on the journey from Sweden to Hambro, Illinois, with the Hansen family. By the time Uncle Adolph arrived in Hambro, my Aunt Anna had married Uncle Knute and moved away. My father was an irretrievably spoiled child of ten; my aunts attributed his adult alcoholism, and his early death, to the indulgences he was permitted as a motherless boy. And by then, almost thirty years old, my Aunt Osa's prospects could hardly have seemed very favorable to her, especially in light of Aunt Claire's already showing signs of becoming too beautiful for a small town to contain. Claire was twenty by then, and Chicago was beckoning; Prohibition was only a few years away.

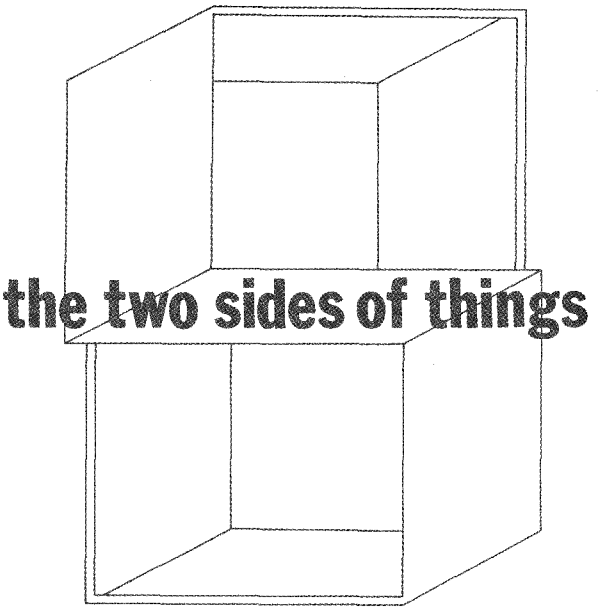
My Aunt Osa faced becoming an old maid, with a future to be lived out in the same house where she was born, with the care of Grandfather Hansen and the spinster Sorenson to assume as they aged into senility.

Then my uncle came, knocked at the porch door to ask if he might take his meals with the Hansen family, who lived near the railroad station; the Illinois Central paid him a per diem to spend, for that purpose, anywhere he pleased.

So it all ended rather happily, in a way. My father died of cirrhosis of the liver, but I was spared seeing much of that, because I was so often visiting my aunt and uncle. And in time, they died, too.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the two sides of things



Aunt Osa outlived him. The last time I saw him, they came to visit me and my wife, in Levittown, Pennsylvania, where I lived a few years ago. Uncle Adolph was, I think, about seventy-five then.

My wife and my aunt were getting up a little lunch in the kitchen—it was separated from the living room by the four-sided fireplace in a Levitt house—and my uncle and I were watching baseball on television in the living room. I got up and said I'd go out to the shopping center for some beer.

"He's not supposed to drink beer, Oskar," my aunt stepped in from the kitchen to say.

"One little can won't hurt," I said. "We can't watch the game without beer." My uncle listened closely, finger pressing the earpiece of his hearing aid deeper into his ear. When it was clear she would not protest further, he got up and picked up his hat.

"I'll come along for the ride," he said. He had had his first stroke just about a year before. I knew it was the last trip east he would ever make; east or anywhere, it was the end of his travels, though I had no special premonition he would die before the year was out. I had to keep a firm grip on his thin, fragile arm as he walked to my car, for he refused to use his cane.

They had the ballgame on TV at the small quickie bar in the shopping center, and Uncle Adolph suggested we get a beer while we were there, so as not to miss the Yankees' turn at bat. While he deprecated contemporary sports heroes—Mantle nor Mays, either one, was a Ruth or a Rogers Hornsby, much less a Nap Lajoie or a Louie F. Sockalexis—still, he liked to watch someone with a good chance of hitting one out of the park. He attributed all the home runs to the rabbit ball; Frank Baker would have murdered the lively ball, my uncle said.

"Put a head on this for us," he said to the bartender when he had finished his glass. He made a great show of peeling a bill off his roll, tossing it on the bar to pay for our beers. He stood out at the bar, one spindly, pathetically thin leg up, pointed shoe on the rail, in the stance of a much younger man: one accustomed to bending his elbow for a couple of hours each day. My uncle scrutinized, with a professional eye, the chalkboard recording the baseball pool the bar ran; he could have told them a few things about odds. I had the silly notion that he was going to ask the bartender for the dice cup, then challenge me to roll for a shot of straight whiskey. But I think that was my imagination, not his.

Dressed in a suit with matching vest, the chain of his railroad watch looped across the slight bulge of his paunch, the authentic straw skimmer from his mature manhood of the nineteen-twenties cocked on his head, he was like some piece of antique furniture in the chromed, paneled, tiled quickie bar. Or like a cutout, a figure removed from the photograph of a big-city saloon of forty years before, pasted in our midst, the whole a superficial ironist's collage. I could taste with my beer, smell with the smoke of the cigar he bought, peeled, pierced, and lit after sniffing, a sense of the dimension of time stronger than any I have known since.

He admitted the second glass of beer made him a little dizzy, so we went home with a six-pack.

After another beer, after lunch, after the game was over, he seemed to withdraw into himself. I suggested we play a little cards, blackjack or casino. Through college, the army, my married life, I had played no cards, but I wanted, for some reason, to get him talking to me. He won the deal on the cut.

"No," he said, breaking his silence as he dealt the hands, "you've done nicely for yourself, boy. Yes," he said, "you've got a job that you can be respected for doing well, you've got a lovely wife—your aunt and I think a great deal of the girl you married. You've got every right to look men in the eye . . . to be respected." I do not know how he happened to hit on exactly what I wanted; I could not have said, then, that I knew that was what I wanted so badly to hear. It is the kind of thing comes to all of us, I think.

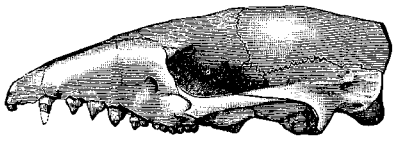
There are the moments when we suddenly feel we have failed ourselves, have betrayed or frittered away what was once best in us, when even our ambitions seem to have evaporated into a filmy mess, when only sour memories come to us when we call on the past for help. They are nothing, these moments, for a man to dwell upon, but they will come.

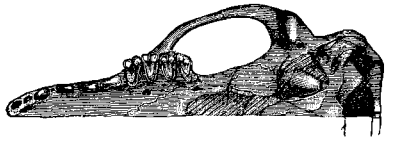
This moment passed for me, in my uncle's kind words, and then we played some blackjack. I decided to risk another card, the fifth, with fourteen. I scratched my hand on the table top, but he did not lay out my fifth card, "Hit me again," I said, looking up from my cards.

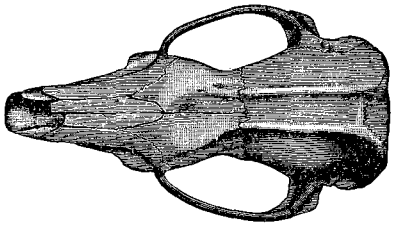
"Shhh," my aunt said softly, coming from the kitchen and taking the deck out of his hands. "He's dozed off from all that beer you gave him. He usually takes a nap in the afternoon at home."

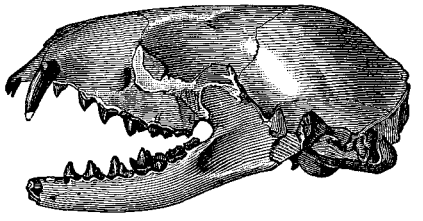
I sat back in my chair and watched him, sleeping. From time to time there was the flutter of a twitch under his eyelids, or a twisting tic at one corner of his mouth, the way there is when a man is dreaming. □

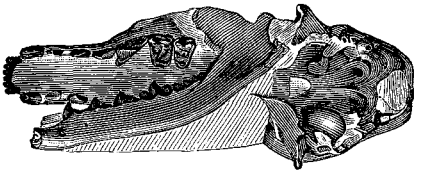
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

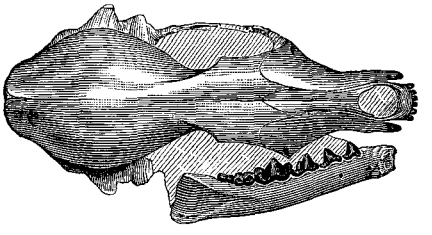












PETER WILD

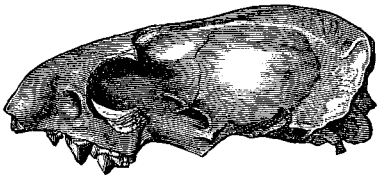
HISTORY OF THE HORSE

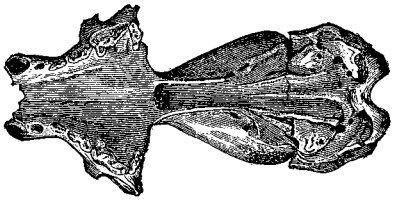
When the first horses came
they were wooden skeletons
stumbling sheepishly out of
the gravelly sunrise. we
picked the flesh from
their bones, the fire strips from
their eyes and ribs, and
with the other garbage
kicked the rest over the cliffs.
but our women glued buckskin
to their legs, and in their ears
hung trinkets. mornings they
came up to our tents smiling
like second moons, and we rode them
who could take us on their thoughts
over the ranges, and when they dropped
found their flesh delicious. we
clothed them in the robes from our backs,
made gold plugs for their noses
and they eating the grass up as in
some dream increased, grew
strong, large as armed windmills
spinning in the sun. released
they flew like lions over the hills
to pounce on mountains, claws spread. we
took their children in, built stone houses for them,
fed them incense, fruit, on holy days
presented the silent virgin's flesh.
at night our village is an island
surrounded by their moving lights
and screams as they tear up the earth
and we sleep in our tattered tents
hugging the tiny scapulas of the
sacrifice on which we dream.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IN CALIFORNIA

In California under the shadow
of the Sierra the wine
bubbles out of the ground,
a hot foam squeezed between
faults, from the pressure
of thermal oceans
under the bending land.
there the girls, air
wrapped in red bandannas
bend to pick the nuggets
from the lava earth
with fingers that echo
their brown breasts
swinging forward in their shirts.
all afternoon the men lounge
high on oaken cart wheels,
take the wind in their teeth,
spit, and bound thin in their
white sashes watch them.
toward evening along the ridge rocks
the cedars burn, reflected
in the lakes of loam; the
planes land, the trains
grind to a halt outside town.
going home they shake the juice
from their fingers, drip by
drip from the skins to the tube.
the planes rise, the trains
wind off into the cooling night
following their burning heads
through the pines, becoming more silent.
it plunges, a cascade under
the night of the land,
strains up mountains,
rushing down slopes
grows a froth tinged
with the moon under the snow,
spreads over the plains,
through the veins of a hand.
already it is next day in the same land
and offshore from Louisiana the
sea bulges, an eye
pokes out, the pig-
creature born again in his fat of salt and
garbage swims toward the land
as back through the stars
they dance in their cottages
slicing their breasts, making
wreaths of the furniture,
uncorks the nipple, hangs there.





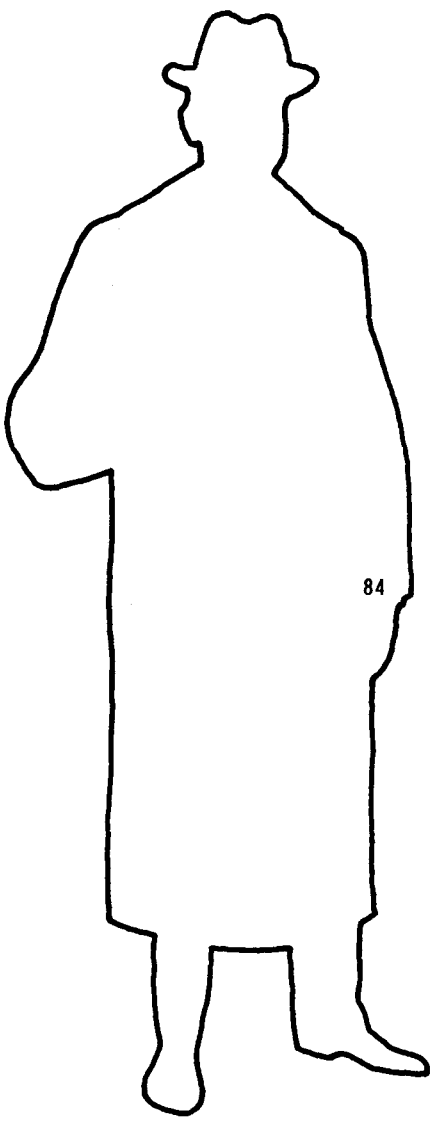
PILGRIMS

Under the stars
the turtle closes her eyes.
her lids fall,
embroidered shades
coming down around a house
and continue, the skeletal legs
of a horse, silver wax
dripping through the darkness toward the ground.
only once her plates glow,
light around the doors
of vaults, and then go out.
her tail switches
where the night starts
and her mouth where the foaming day
begins for someone else.
meanwhile in the forest
they lay themselves down
this is their night only
and they grapple, wrapping
themselves in their limbs,
staring into the mockery of ashes,
skirts, the belly of a cow ripped out
feel their legs below,
cold cordwood,
watching where their leather vests
open, the growing pyramids
of snow pile out, high among the foliage
the pinpoints forming,
the flaming words begin to fall.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A STORY BY FLOSSIE LEWIS

A Gentleman in a Dustcoat



She knew it wasn't Teddy in the dream. Nor Charles. No, this lover was much older, and his features were bonier, his hair thin and even gray. Sometimes he wore a dustcoat. So who was he? All day long he filled her with delight. The actual details of his love talk and his love making began to blur immediately after she left the bed, but the fragrance lasted. While she worked in the bank and later made dinner, she kept sniffing so that Charles asked her—

"Allergy season?"

She quit sniffing. And for a week she dreamed of other things, and then he returned. His voice was low and measured. He spoke of things—what things, she could not recall—but always reassuringly. In her dream she trembled with delight. And awoke with the taste of Turkish candy in her mouth. And for two days she could not shake an awareness of him. On a street car, shopping at Petrini's Plaza, walking by Lone Mountain—she felt certain she would turn a corner or sit down at a bus stop and she would find his face. Charles, noticing her heightened awareness of sounds, for example, asked her if it were the hormones. He tried to be reassuring too. The hysterectomy the year before.

Then Ruth visited from Los Angeles, and the visit shook Mary Beth as usual. Ruth was a positive, driving bee of a woman. She always left Mary Beth stung in fifteen different spots on her psyche. This time Ruth reported visiting a medium, and actually hearing from Marvin—darling, soft spoken Marvin, who had had a massive cardiac occlusion when he was only thirty-nine years old. Marvin, mind you, three years dead, had warned Ruth to stay away from her new tax man. Bizarre! Because a week later, the office of the tax man was raided by the Feds, and he was charged with being an embezzler and a pimp.

And soon after Ruth's whirlwind of a visit, her own beloved returned. The setting was now full of sweeping and drifting fog. The sand dunes went on forever. The water was a blur. And the beloved called, "Mary Beth—

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

here I am," and his laughter at her bewilderment and struggle was musical and refined. Mary Beth woke up—saying to Charles:

"Oh, but I want to find you. With all my heart—where are you?"

"What's that?" Charles asked. And he kissed her.

Quite by accident, she met Teddy coming out of Macy's on O'Farrell Street.

"Baby," he bellowed.

She smiled and waved. "Gotta buy boots," she said and brushed through five people and a glass door.

"Sure," Teddy said.

Oh, it could not be Teddy in the dreams, for all that he could once fill her full of blossoms and ribbons of pleasure. Nor was it Charles who could make love only when he was manic, and he was manic only after he had put down a new patent or a new blueprint and how often did that happen? Besides, it always burned with Charles—so really it didn't matter anymore. And besides, the hysterectomy. Sex wasn't responsible for those dreams. The memory of sex? Teddy was such a pickle, such a dullard, so lacking in manly imagination, while Charles was, after all, a charmer to whom you could say:

"Look, Teddy was once my lover, and he likes to remind me of it from time to time."

And Charles could meet Teddy on a street corner and ask him to stop.

"Stop it, Teddy. Don't be a pest, O.K.?"

Or when Mary Beth once said,

"I really don't know what I ever saw in Teddy"—Charles could say,

"A good partner in bed, I dare say." The daresay.

So who was the demon lover? No. He was an older man, much older. Her dad, now in a home in Pasadena? Oh never! Nor her uncle Jed whom she so loved as a little girl just because Jed had been a missionary in China and could speak Mandarin. So who was it?

Ruth called one night from Los Angeles to tell Mary Beth of something that had occured to Holly Anna, Ruth's eighteen year old daughter, who was studying voice in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Her teacher had unearthed some Tzigane Liede, from the 18th Century, and Holly Anna, who had a startling and stately contralto, was preparing to memorize the strange lyrics when a gypsy lady appeared to Holly Anna in a dream and said,

"Holly Anna Leff, I forbid you to sing my songs."

And Holly Anna laughed, not in the dream but when it was over, and she continued to memorize the songs, and the gypsy lady returned and said to her,

"Holly Anna, I will torture the dead, your father, the beloved Marvin."

So Holly Anna called Ruth from Belgrade and asked what she should do and Ruth went back to her medium and they couldn't get in touch with Marvin. Ruth told Holly Anna to return the Tzigane songs to the old bureau drawer from whence they came. And now Ruth and the medium sat waiting to hear from Marvin, and Marvin was nowhere to be found. Mary Beth left the telephone trembling—

"Oh, my beloved," she said. "How shall I find you?"

And she tried hard to dream. No dreams. And Ruth

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heard nothing from Marvin either, and in desperation Ruth went to stay with her son who was living in Canada but looked like Marvin. For two months the telephone ceased to ring in Mary Beth's house at midnight, Ruth's favorite witching hour. Quiet. Spring came. The eastern lilac bloomed in the front yard. Mary Beth cut some branches and brought them into the flat.

"Did the landlady see you?" asked Charles.

"She says we can help ourselves to flowers. We certainly pay enough."

Charles sniffed.

"They are lovely," he said.

You are lovely," the beloved whispered to Mary Beth. They were in bed. Where was Charles?

"Who *are* you?" Mary Beth said. "Why don't I call you a name?"

"We loved once, Mary Beth. We loved once. Try to remember."

"Was I lovely?"

"You were sick."

Mary Beth could not get to work at the bank that morning. Charles called for her and said she had the flu. He made her a thermos of noodle soup.

"Try to finish this before noon and then keep going with apple juice. I'll be home at four."

Mary Beth wrote to Ruth.

"Ruth, what shall I do? Can a former life haunt you?" Mary Beth described all the dreams, and then suddenly she decided not to send the letter to Ruth after all or to tell anyone, not Charles, not Babette, their fifteen year old daughter, adopted, who was now attending the Santa Catalina School for Girls and very happy there. Babette would love such a dream story.

"Oh, Mama, dream some more," she would surely say. And Ruth, if she got Mary Beth's letter, would insist on a medium. And Charles would seek the chemical imbalance.

And so, in bed with the noodle soup, Mary Beth resolved to keep her dreams and her demon lover to her own deep content. For he was no demon. He was asking her to remember; there was a love once lived and, therefore, deeply felt, so deeply felt it had made him full of divine wrinkles and long lines. He wasn't urging her to be careful or to avoid singing strange songs. But he filled her with a hunger. He was asking her to remember the love they bore together, the love that had caused his hair to thin, his body to grow lank. When Charles came home and asked if she felt rested, she had the most awful kind of headache but she could respond with a smile and the V-for-peace sign.

So Mary Beth let him come to her openly. Anytime of the day. She would look up from her desk in the bank, and he would wave to her from the President's chair. Mowing the lawn, she would see him come down the street and post a letter in the mail box. Once, wearing the dust-coat, he helped her cut the roses, and in the sunlight she kissed the roses. Charles found her sitting on the lawn, her face buried in the roses.

Going to visit Babette in Santa Barbara, all the way down, she lived close to him. It was he who drove the car and stopped so that they could go walking in a field of artichokes or lettuce. It didn't matter. Charles asked her if she was happy.

"Of course," she replied.

Babette was happy, too. She was deeply religious now, and the sisters understood her. Santa Catalina was awfully expensive, but Uncle Jed had made good connections in China, and Babette had a partial scholarship. Money was never a problem, really.

The headaches were a problem. When she ached behind her ear and over the right eye, she could not dream. She had to wake and take codeine and sleep on her side. The beloved appeared mostly when she slept on her stomach. But if the night was dreadful and full of pain, he would be at her side all of the next day. And then there would be no memory of the pain. And one night when she spent the whole of her dream looking for him in a forest of dried leaves, she was so wretched that once more she spent the day in bed and dreamed a whole morning. Finally in the last dream he appeared and he said to her,

"Try to remember me, Mary Beth. I love you now."

"Was I cruel to you once?"

"No, you were sick."

Ruth returned from Canada full of new adventures. She had been tripping on acid, mescaline, hash—all in an effort to find Marvin and once, on acid, she had spoken to him

"He looked awful—he's in trouble—It's that lousy gypsy."

"Is Holly Anna O.K.?"

"I don't know. But I'm sure that she hasn't given up on those songs. She's stubborn. That's why I can't find Marvin except if I fight the gypsy with acid and stuff."

Ruth was now content to sip only sherry with Mary Beth, and sherry always did relax Mary Beth so that she ventured to talk about the idea of loving in a former life.

"Oh, sure," said Ruth. "You know Bridie Murphy." Mary Beth didn't keep too long on the subject, for Charles came in and the conversation turned to draft resistance.

The doctor gave her Demerol for the headaches. Demerol was simply grand—except that when she took Demerol the beloved would not appear, not in the night, not in the day. He came only following pain, a reward. A reward for what?—a reward for remembering?

"I'm trying so hard to remember," Mary Beth called out in the middle of the bank one morning. And everyone said that she was working too hard.

The summer fog rolled in. One afternoon Mary Beth left the bank at 3:30 and caught the street car to do some shopping. The fog would not lift and Mary Beth rubbed her hands together and even took out some gloves from her handbag. She found a seat on the street car.

"A nippy day."

Mary Beth said, yes, it certainly was.

"What lovely hands you have."

Mary Beth smelled a trace of liquor on his breath.

"Thank you," she said.

"Are you a native of San Francisco?"

"I was born in Modesto."

"I was born in Colorado."

Mary Beth looked at him. He was seedy but genteel.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He looked at her quite evenly. He did not appear apologetic.

"I knew you once," he said.

And Mary Beth saw the bony structure of his face, the thinning of his hair, the gray blue of his eyes—the strength, the promise, despite the bloodshot.

"Have you ever had that feeling?" he asked her.

Mary Beth looked into his eyes—

"Yes," she said.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Mary Beth."

"Mary Beth, I'd ask you to have a drink with me, but I'm broke."

"I have to get off now," she said.

But she scribbled her name on a book of matches and handed it to him.

"Mrs. Roland Charles."

Mary Beth Charles—415-566-7800.

She got off at Powell Street. He rode on.

And she waited for him to call or to write, and for a month she did not dream, even when she laid off the Demerol. In September the weather became unbearable. The smog was thick. The air smelled like the inside of a pencil sharpener. Babette asked her to come spend a week, because Babette had scarcely been home that summer—Girl Scout Camp, Music Camp. Mary Beth took the bus to Santa Catalina and had a perfectly lovely time with Babette and the other girls and the sisters, and the headaches she kept under control with codeine one night, Demerol the next, and the lover did not appear. Charles called her to say the smog had lifted. Ruth called her to say she had at last found Marvin. And Mary Beth came home to find that there was a message for her to call Teddy.

"What does he want?"

"I have no idea."

He wanted to shack up a little—once more—before they both got too old. That's what he wanted.

"Teddy," she cried, "Teddy—I love Charles with a passion and a devotion that I did not deem myself capable of owning."

Teddy was short on words.

"Sure," he said, "but when can we get together?"

"Teddy, you cannot give me what Charles gives me."

"Hey, why don't you call him by his first name. Roland." And Teddy cackled.

Mary Beth hung up.

That night—no Demerol could stem the tide. Mary Beth was nauseous from the headache. All night long, she shook with wretchedness. In the morning Charles called the doctor, and together they decided that Mary Beth should have a series of tests. Mary Beth was skeptical.

For people made such a fuss about pain. Pain could be a friend. This pain was the beloved breaking through to her. But Charles looked so unhappy. And when the tests were over, and he came to speak about the results, he held her in his arms and kissed her hair. He spoke about having Babette come back from Santa Catalina; maybe they could all go together to see the little church Uncle Jed had built for the Indians in Arizona. Would she like Ruth to visit? he asked. It was only when he suggested that she might like to spend some time with Teddy—Teddy, mind—that Mary Beth understood. And Mary Beth screamed that she had sold herself too cheaply, that she had let herself be taken in by glibness. The second wave brought fear.

"There is no one," she said to Charles. "There *was* no one."

And Charles thought she meant Teddy. Or God. □

MARK HALPERIN

A MAN GOING DEAF

might even be your father. Once I asked
him question like, what time is it, and he
said, five o'clock or four-fifteen,
but like a man stopped in the street. I basked
in those brief answers. Anonymity
was all I cared for. If we sin
I think its when we shun a simple task

like talking. And still I would have said, he heard
little. Evenings, when I had given up
at homework, I would seek my mother's help.
I'd troop into the kitchen. How absurd
he seemed when, puzzled, he would interrupt:
who argues with his mother? He felt
conflict then, confusion afterward.

Had your mother died when you were two . . .
My mother told him off. He, to be fair,
bought records for me. When I learned to play
the banjo he was unimpressed. The clue
lay in a photograph I'd found somewhere:
strangely dressed, a balalaka laid
across his feet, he is the foreign Jew.

In restaurants he'd fuss. He's getting old
I'd think. And I remember I'd grow angry
repeating those few phrases he would need
to hear again. But I heard less than he
did and the void in me that breeds
harsh judgements on my lack of feeling holds

my loss. As he sits reading "Of A Place
That Is No More," an old man visiting
his son, I want to think that in my house
the sounds surrounding him become a lace
of fine design. As growing deafness brings
him bubbles rising from the mouths
of fish, I think of all the time I've wasted.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FICTION INTERNATIONAL

announces

the

ST. LAWRENCE AWARD

for

FICTION

to be presented under the auspices of St. Lawrence University in conjunction with the David B. Steinman Festival of the Arts.

The award will consist of a cash prize of $1000 and will be offered to the author of an outstanding first collection of short fiction published by an American publisher in 1973.

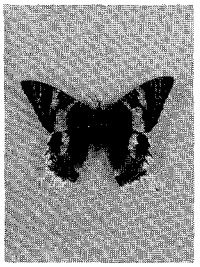
Editors, writers, agents, readers, and publishers are invited to submit or suggest eligible books or advance copies immediately. Publishers must submit final nominations, and these must be received by January 15, 1974.

Announcement of the award will be made in the Spring, 1974, issue of *Fiction International* magazine.

All entries should be addressed to: *Fiction International,* Department of English, St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York 13617.

Subscriptions: $4 a year; $8 to institutions

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



BOOKS & AUTHORS

Robert Gish / Stephen Minot

Virginia Woolf, A Biography, by Quentin Bell. Harcourt. $12.50.

Although Virginia Woolf's legacy is primarily to the novel, she holds no small part in the development of biography. In fact, her interest in biography is related to her interest in the novel and to the whole complex relationship between literature and life. This is a major reason why Quentin Bell's biography, *Virginia Woolf*, is worth the attention of the "common reader." The attraction is heightened by the fact that Quentin Bell is Virginia Woolf's nephew and that his father, Clive Bell, had a fondness for Virginia that went beyond that of a brother-in-law. Both because of and in spite of his family ties, Quentin Bell proves up to the job. His previous book, *Bloomsbury*, also qualifies him to write a biography of Virginia Woolf and may be considered a companion to the present volume. Moreover, this biography was sanctioned by Leonard Woolf, whose own autobiography is indispensable to anyone interested in Virginia Woolf or autobiography—a genre Mrs. Woolf wanted to pursue and began, indirectly, in her diary.

Throughout *Virginia Woolf* one wishes he could read the 27 manuscript volumes of diaries which Virginia Woolf wrote from 1915 until her death in 1941 and which, as unpublished material (except for *A Writer's Diary* [1953]), provides the nucleus for Bell's book. Access to The New York Public Library's Berg Collection, which includes these diaries and Virginia Woolf's letters to her sister, Vanessa Bell, and to others like Violet Dickinson, Vita Sackville-West, and Ethel Smyth, would be overwhelming for the common reader. Faced with this mountain of material and other evidence from newspapers and contemporaries, Bell had considerable basis for choice.

This problem that all biographers face was complicated for the son of Vanessa and Clive Bell, the nephew of Virginia Stephen Woolf, and biographer obliged to be "truthful" for an audience of family, friends, the public, and posterity. Much of the fascination of the end result is realizing that the "facts" so essential to this biography have been sifted and selected, and that everything included suggests many things excluded. Insanity, incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, promiscuity, frigidity, hate, envy, snobbery, love, friendship, artistic genius—Bell's choices through it all are tasteful, enticing, and, in places, dramatically suspenseful. "Facts" are balanced with guesswork and the reader is able to distinguish between them. Much was excluded; many people affected are still alive. But much is included—things never before published, such as an epistolary critical exchange between E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf. And although one can only wildly speculate whether or not Mrs. Woolf would approve of her nephew's choices, this reader—admittedly not aware of all the options—does approve.

One of Bell's choices is to avoid literary criticism. Many would lament this but, ultimately, the criticism is hardly missed. It could be argued that Bell hedges his bets in places, but he says in the foreword to the first volume: "The purpose of the present volume is purely historical; and although I hope that I may assist those who attempt to explain and to assess the writing of Virginia Woolf, I can do so only by presenting facts which hitherto have not been generally known and by providing what will, I hope, be a clear and truthful account of the character and personal development of my subject." Even so, here is a book to be read by every "critic" interested in Mrs. Woolf, Forster, Lytton Strachey, Katherine Mansfield, Henry James, or even James Russell Lowell, Virginia's godfather and a close friend of her father, Leslie Stephen. Certainly critics interested in the novel and biography are obligated to read it, as are people *merely* interested in the lives of writers who happen to be people.

The increasing interest in Virginia Woolf is accounted for in large part by the latest surge in the feminist movement which finds in her an old friend. Try to order *A Room of One's Own* for class use and read the publisher's reply: "Unavailable at this time." Read the Autumn 1972 issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*, a special Virginia Woolf issue, and note the feminist stance of many of the articles. Read *The Politics of Literature* (Pantheon Books, 1972), which ends on the question, "Who's Afraid of A Room of One's Own?" Appropriately, the first issue of *The Virginia Woolf Quarterly* is recently out. And self-confident co-eds may be heard referring to the Virginia Woolf they read about in *Ms* magazine. The Virginia Woolf bibliography swells in the library and the drug store.

Although Bell's study is another in a series of books about Mrs. Woolf—most notably Aileen Pippitt's *The Moth and the Star* (Little, Brown, 1955), and Harvena Richter's *The*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Inward Voyage (Princeton, 1970), like Noel Annan's *Leslie Stephen* (Harvard, 1952), Michael Holroyd's *Lytton Strachey* (Penguin, 1971), and probably P. N. Furbank's forthcoming biography of E. M. Forster—Bell's book is a momentous book, one that can be hailed for some time as definitive. Because of books like these as well as Samuel Hynes' *The Edwardian Mind* (Princeton, 1968) and F. K. Johnstone's *The Bloomsbury Group* (Noonday, 1954), Bell's biography should ride the crest of the wave, almost a tidal wave, of interest in what has been called the Heroic Age of the modern English novel or, we might add, the age in which modern biography began to bloom.

Virginia Woolf knew the boundaries of the traditional novel of "thirty and two chapters," as she said. And she knew the boundaries of biography, even while her claim as an innovator of the modern novel and modern biography meant the widening of those boundaries. Here she is attempting to summarize the biographer's task:

> Truth of fact and truth of fiction are incompatible, yet he [the biographer] is now more than ever urged to combine them. For it would seem that the life which is increasingly real to us is the fictitious life; it dwells in the personality rather than in the act. Each of us is more Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, than he is John Smith of the Corn Exchange. Thus, the biographer's imagination is always being stimulated to use the novelist's art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life. Yet if he carries the use of fiction too far, so that he desregards the truth, or can only introduce it with incongruity, he loses both worlds; he has neither the freedom of fiction nor the substance of fact.

There are these two worlds in Bell's biography. It is a satisfying mixture of granite ("truth") and rainbow ("personality") to use Mrs. Woolf's own metaphors. Her personality is in the forefront of fact; her private life is transmitted through fact, and that life is both triumphant and tragic. The battle she did with evil forces in her life was, all things considered, triumphant because of her writing and her marriage to Leonard Woolf. But her marriage was childless, she was troubled by bouts with madness, the hearing of strange voices, and the compulsion to kill herself—which she did in 1941, at the age of 59, by walking into the river Ouse. Her troubles are only part of her story, but in Bell's biography they loom large. The daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, the eminent man of letters and Alpinist, and Julia Duckworth, a widow with three children when she married Stephen, Virginia had more than enough brothers and sisters. Leslie Stephen had been married before to Harriet Marian, Thackeray's daughter, and their daughter, Laura, was insane. Leslie and Julia had four children: Vanessa, Thoby, Virginia and Adrian.

Bell's biography convinces us that family relationships were crucial in shaping Virginia's personality. There were happy times in her life: good times with her father, listening to his stories, looking at his drawings of animals, reading his books; good times growing up in London at 22 Hyde Park Gate and in St. Ives at Talland House—St. Ives being, Bell submits, found in *To the Lighthouse*, *Jacob's Room*, and *The Waves*. Later there were the Bloomsbury gatherings, the "Thursday Evenings" with Thoby, Vanessa and then Adrian at 46 Gordon Square and 29 Fitzroy Square. There was Virginia's and Leonard's husband-wife enterprise of the Hogarth Press—an enterprise not without troubles.

Troubles, however, started early for Virginia and more than anything else, seem to have shaped her personality. She did not speak until age three. Even as a child she would go into "purple rages" and though Bell is careful not to speculate on the nature of what might be regarded as the beginning of her struggle with insanity and her three serious breakdowns, he "advisedly" writes that "madness walked the streets" and records that the facts of childhood would later become ingredients of fiction: "The scene in *The Years* where the child Rose sees a man exposing himself by a lamp-post is based on experience; there was such a man who hung around Hyde Park Gate and was seen by both Vanessa and Virginia." There was Laura Stephen, Virginia's half sister who lived at home, a burden to the family. Her cousin, J. K. Stephen, damaged his head in an accident and went mad, running about the nursery at 22 Hyde Park Gate, wielding a sword or violently pursuing Stella Duckworth. And George Duckworth, Stella's brother and Virginia's half-brother, proved the arch-villain in Virginia's life. Bell reports Virginia saying in a letter to her much later friend, Ethel Smyth, "I still shiver with shame at the memory of my half-brother, standing me on a ledge, aged 6 or so, exploring my private parts." But George was after Virginia's sister, Vanessa, too. And Quentin Bell, though confined to facts as biographer, speaks somewhat like a son and nephew in his assessment of George's misbehavior:

> In later years Virginia's and Vanessa's friends were a little astonished at the unkind mockery, the downright virulence with which the sisters referred to their half-brother. He seemed to be a slightly ridiculous but on the whole an inoffensive old buffer, and so, in a sense, he was. His public face was amiable. But to his half-sisters he stood for something horrible and obscene, the final element of foulness in what was already an appalling situation. More than that, he came to pollute the most sacred of springs, to defile their very dreams. A first experience of loving or being loved may be enchanting, desolating, embarrassing or even boring; but it should not be disgusting. Eros came with a commotion of leathern wings, a figure of mawkish incestuous sexuality. Virginia felt that George had spoilt her life before it had fairly begun. Naturally shy in sexual matters, she was from this time terrified back into a posture of frozen and defensive panic.

Bell is careful to say he does not know to what lengths George carried his "affections" for his sisters. It was obviously traumatic for Virginia, though Bell avoids a causal link with her adult mental illnesses. Virginia Woolf did not become completely passionless for she did have "love relationships" of varying degrees with Walter Headlam, Edward Hilton Young, Lytton Strachey, Clive Bell, Vita Sackville-West, Ethel Smyth, and of course Leonard Woolf. Bell convinces us, however, that her adult life was as troublesome as her youth.

Virginia Stephen's marriage in 1912 to Leonard Woolf found her still thinking of herself as Miss Stephen and saying in a letter to her friend Ka

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cox, "Why do you think people make such a fuss about marriage and copulation? . . . I find the climax immensely exaggerated." Vanessa had married Clive Bell in 1907 and had made Virginia at once happy and jealous. Also, her beloved brother Thoby had died of typhoid in 1906 and, in 1907, Virginia changed: "Hitherto men, as lovers, seem to have played no role at all in her imagination. There is nothing in her letters or diaries to suggest that any man had inspired her with the slightest erotic excitement. All her passions, her jealousies and tenderness are kept for her own sex . . .; but now, although very far from falling in love with any man, she was at least ready to flirt." The most significant and distressing flirtation took place with Quentin Bell's father. How the biographer handles it is masterful; he is willing to preserve more of Virginia's virtue than his father was.

> In a word, Clive, after thirteen months of marriage, entered into a violent and prolonged flirtation with his sister-in-law.
>
> I use the word flirtation, for if I called this attachment an 'affair' it would suggest that Clive succeeded in his object, which was indeed no less, and I think not much more, than a delightful little infidelity ending up in bed. Many years later Virginia accused him of being a cuckoo that lays its eggs in other birds' nests. 'My dear Virginia,' was his cheerful reply, 'you never would let me lay an egg in your nest.' In fact I doubt whether the business would have lasted for so long or, for a time, have become so important to them both if Virginia had given him what he wanted. But this she never did and, in a very crude sense, her conduct may be described as virtuous.

It was a game in which everyone lost, motivated by Virginia's loneliness and envy of her sister's marriage. Ironically, Quentin Bell says that it was Vanessa and not Clive that Virginia really loved. If so, it was a love tinged with envy and competition. She came to resent Vanessa's three children somewhat as she had resented Thoby's Cambridge education and masculine privileges. They were things she didn't have.

Bell makes it clear that although Virginia's loves and friendships brought her happiness, they also brought pain. The deaths of her father, her brother Thoby, her friends Lytton Strachey

A Directory of American Poets

in a revised and enlarged edition listing 1300 poets

includes address, telephone number, teaching preference, latest book. Poets' listing is alphabetical by state.

Additional listings include 400 national organizations which sponsor poets; anthologies, films, videotapes and other material about contemporary poets.

ORDER FORM

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

Number of copies _____ **($4.00 per copy) Total: $** _____

Please enclose check or money order payable to "Poets and Writers, Inc.," 201 West 54th Street, New York City, New York 10019. For further information, call (212) PLaza 7-1766.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Roger Fry, affected her greatly. Her love affair with Vita Sackville-West ultimately failed. Though she had her writing to buoy her up, there was the depression of deaths of those near to her, and two wars. Even her love for Leonard and her work were not enough to see her through.

Her love for her work was mixed with the fear that her life and writing would be thought fatuous and cruelly laughed at by critics. Her madness cannot be dissociated from her work. In what amounts to a consideration of his own book, Bell says this about Virginia's headaches and sleepless nights:

> Almost anyone who has attempted to create a work of art will have an inkling of what she felt. A book is so much a part of oneself that in delivering it to the public one feels as if one were pushing one's own child out into the traffic. If it be killed or hurt the injury is done to oneself, and if it be one's firstborn, the product of seven years' gestation, if it be awkward and vulnerable and needing all the tenderness and all the understanding that no critic will ever give, anxiety for its fate becomes acute.

Critical "enemies" like Frank Swinnerton and Wyndham Lewis contributed to what Bell calls Virginia's "hysterical attitude to the potentialities of criticism." Her allies included Leonard Woolf and E. M. Forster, whose opinions she regarded more highly than anyone's.

Bell's respect for Leonard Woolf is unqualified; he is portrayed as without self-pity or anger in reacting to his wife's illnesses. Throughout the second volume, which deals with the years 1912-1941, from their marriage to Virginia's death, Leonard's role in Virginia's life is emphasized. Their life at Asham, Hogarth House, and Monk's House; the experiences surrounding the writing of *The Voyage Out*, *Jacob's Room*, *The Common Reader*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *A Room of One's Own*, *The Waves*—Virginia Woolf's years of achievement; the downhill period of *The Years*, *Three Guineas*, and *Roger Fry;* the world wars and social and political commitment—through it all Leonard has a leading part and Bell stages it well. The events build to and culminate in Virginia's suicide. Her poignant death-note to Leonard ends the book: "I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been." The reader knows, however, that Virginia Woolf's happiness was a mixture of granite and rainbow. Quentin Bell, living up to Virginia Woolf's definition of biography, leaves no doubt about that. *—Robert Gish*

The Murphy Stories, by Mark Costello. Illinois. $2.50 (paper)

Mark Costello loves words. This cannot be said for all young writers. He loves them as a glutton loves his food and a rapist loves his women. He is neither neat nor precise, but it is fascinating to watch him indulge his appetite.

These stories come from such magazines as the *Chicago Review*, *Transatlantic Review*, and *North American Review*. They're that type. Good, that is. But what makes them a superior collection is the way they adhere to each other—almost, but not quite, a novel.

Partly, this is a matter of style. It's explosive at best; some might say logorrhetic. Take this description of Uncle Mort.

> Out of World War II he swings, flat, flatulent, hemorrhoidal, hyperbolic, sleepy, lazy, squat, penniless, hypertense. My sense of him is dazed . . . .

And we as readers are soon dazed—pleasantly so—with this bizarre use of language.

Sometimes the effect is like a dream's metaphor. His Aunt Hatt, for example, comes to us this way:

> Aunt Hatt's exhaustion shows most clearly along her jaw, her false teeth set farther forward on her jaw than they ever have been before. Then she begins to grind her teeth and I feel once more the fit of a German paratrooper's helmet on my head, imagine Aunt Hatt's lips turning blue beneath its weight, her black hair sticking stiff from below its steel rim . . . .

He has an imagination which has somehow drawn on Nathanael West, Joseph Heller, and Terry Southern. How else could he have come up with a scene like this:

> In his bathroom, in his bathtub, a Baptist minister's 18-year-old daughter sits in six inches of tepid water, the shower curtain pulled around her, a candle flickering on the soap tray, a cello churning and squawking between her knees.

The plot has to do with a marriage blowing apart. There isn't much new here, I'm afraid, but somehow one doesn't notice. With such bitter hostility running through the dialogue and such incredible things to watch, one hardly asks for ingenuity of plot.

What comes through on every page is vitality. I rate this high. We owe a vote of thanks to the University of Illinois Press for having the courage to bring Mark Costello before the public. But ultimately, the thanks goes to Costello himself. His fresh use of language is a pleasure to experience.

—Stephen Minot

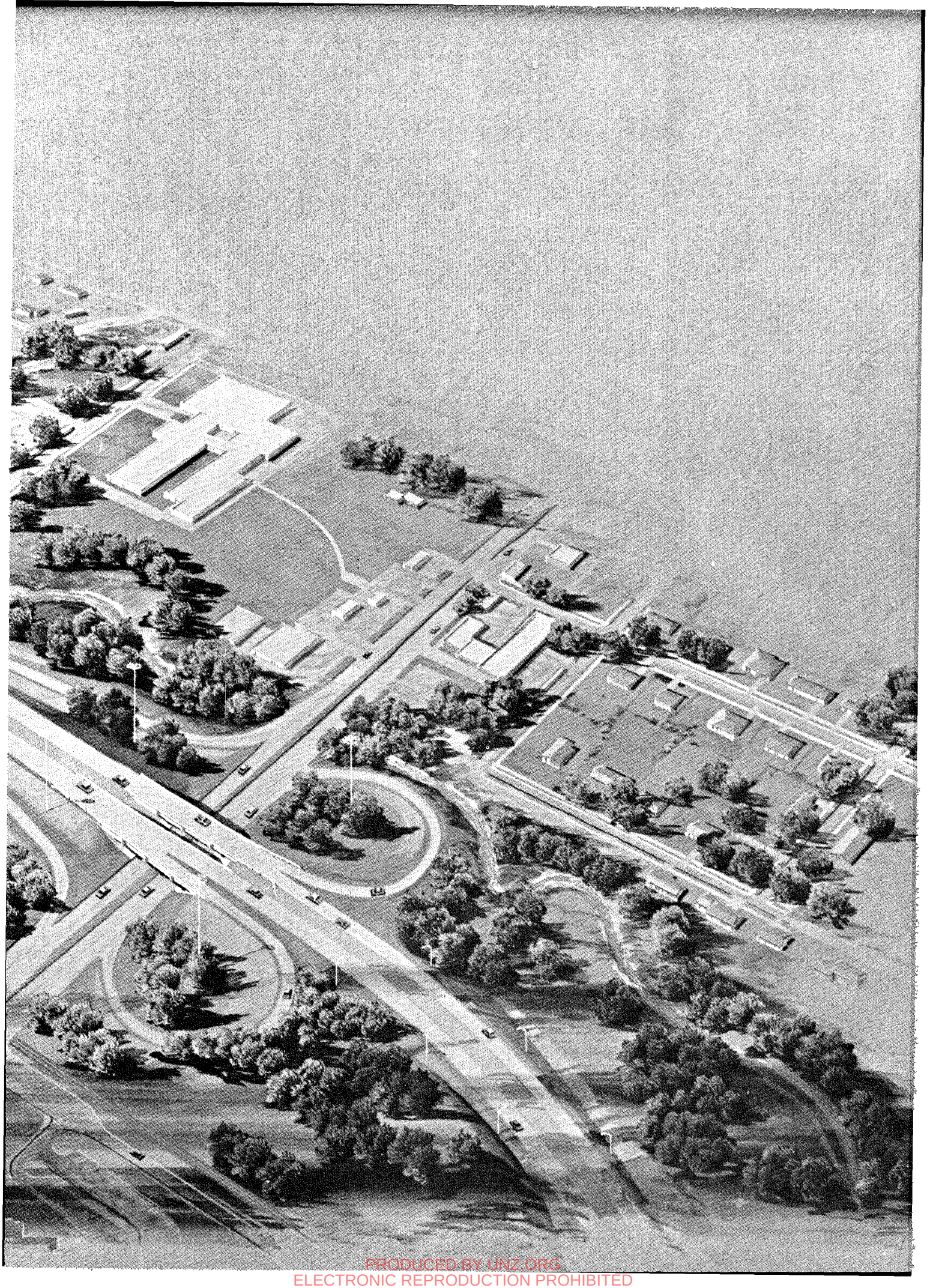
Coming in the NAR:

Leo Hertzel on the Urban Freeway Dilemma

Richard Howard on recent poetry Jerome Klinkowitz on recent fiction

Stories by George V. Higgins, Chester Aaron, Lawrence Sargent Hall

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"...Behind the superficial appearance of our mighty strength, there is a terrible and touching vulnerability. In innocence and optimism, we have made a world beyond our wildest dreams, and before our averted eyes it is turning into a nightmare in which the fortunate are only frightened, derelict, aimless, driven, alienated or bored, and the hard luck cases are strung out on lethal drugs or driven into acts of violence against themselves or anyone who happens by. In charge of all this are men whose deepest commitment is to the suppression of evidence so that everything can go efficiently forward, no one need be alarmed, and no one can be blamed. These days, the truth about ourselves is not to be had for the asking. It can be revealed only by those who are bold enough—or well enough placed—to steal it from the files."

— R. A. Richardson
(p. 3)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED